

AMERICAN LITERATURE PAPERS



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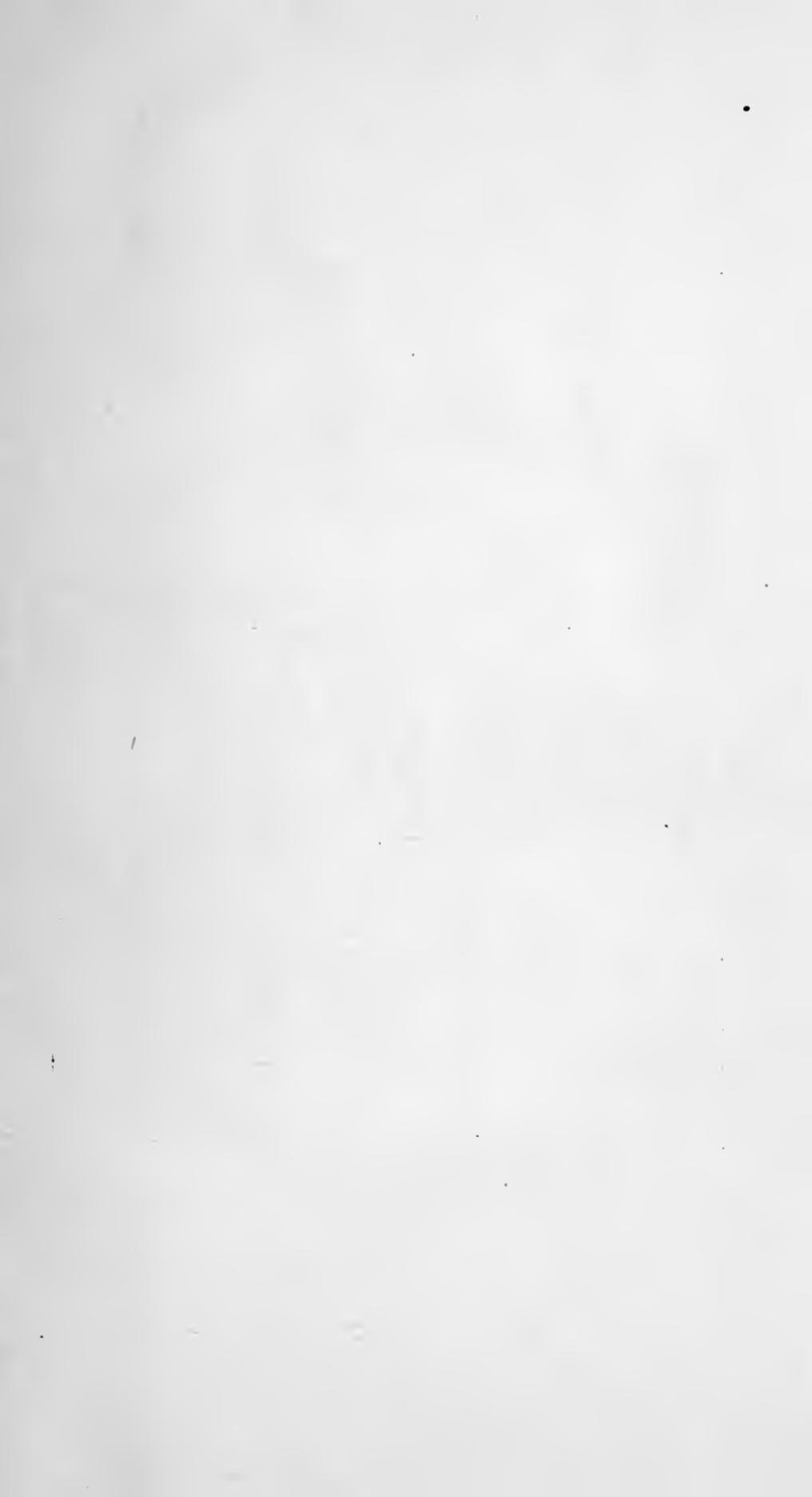
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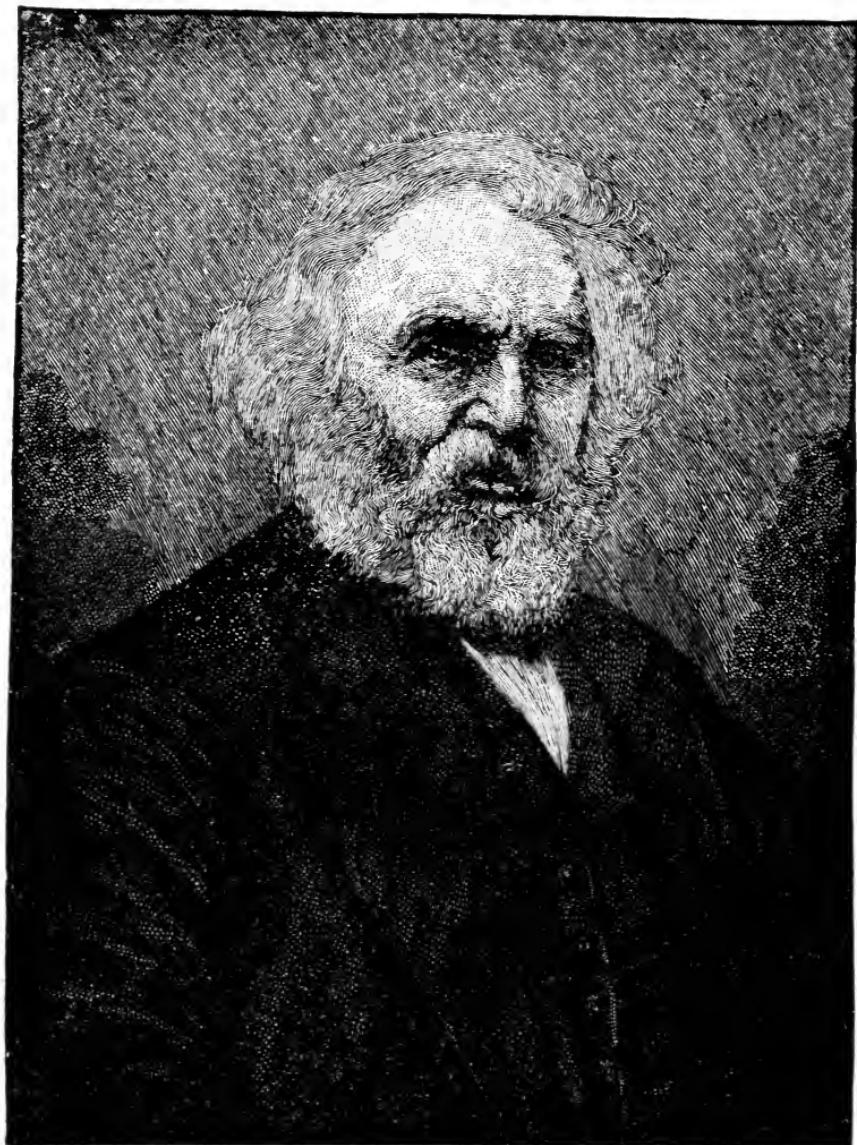
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.







HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.
(Born 1807 — Died 1882.)

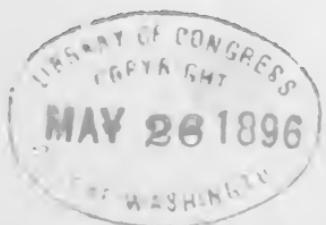
AMERICAN LITERATURE PAPERS

BY

ELIZABETH ABBOTT

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AUTHOR OF "ROMAN LITERATURE PAPERS," ETC



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I.

SOLOMON'S VISIT TO THE CAPITOL.

THERE must be miles of them!" said Solomon — not Solomon the king, but Solomon Smith. He was visiting the United States Capitol at Washington, and stood in the entrance of the Library of Congress gazing about at the heaps and tables and shelves and corridors of books, books, books ; and at courteous Mr. Spofford, the librarian, seated at his desk and looking as though he needed a Noah's Ark to save him from the flood of papers and volumes that crowded him nearly out of his own office.

Solomon was quite right. If we should take all the books of the Government Libraries at Washington and stretch them, end to end, along one of the smooth Kansas prairies, how long a walk would it be from one end of the

SOLOMON'S VISIT TO THE CAPITOL.

line to the other? It is a hard question to answer, but we may be sure that we should have to travel a great many more than a hundred miles. The Capitol made Solomon feel very proud of his country (prouder than he had ever been except in firecracker times on the Fourth of July); and he was quite right again, in thinking that all these American books were a grand sight, as they poured in upon the clerks of the Library until they found scarcely room to set their feet.

Not all American books, to be sure, for the Library of Congress has a fine collection of the best books of all countries, but more American books than most of us have ever seen brought together in one place. One way in which the Library grows is by receiving copies of all the books which are copyrighted in this country, since the law requires that they must be sent there. When we think of the number of volumes which have been obtained in this way since the days when American writings began, we cannot doubt that the story of the growth of all this literature would be an interesting one.

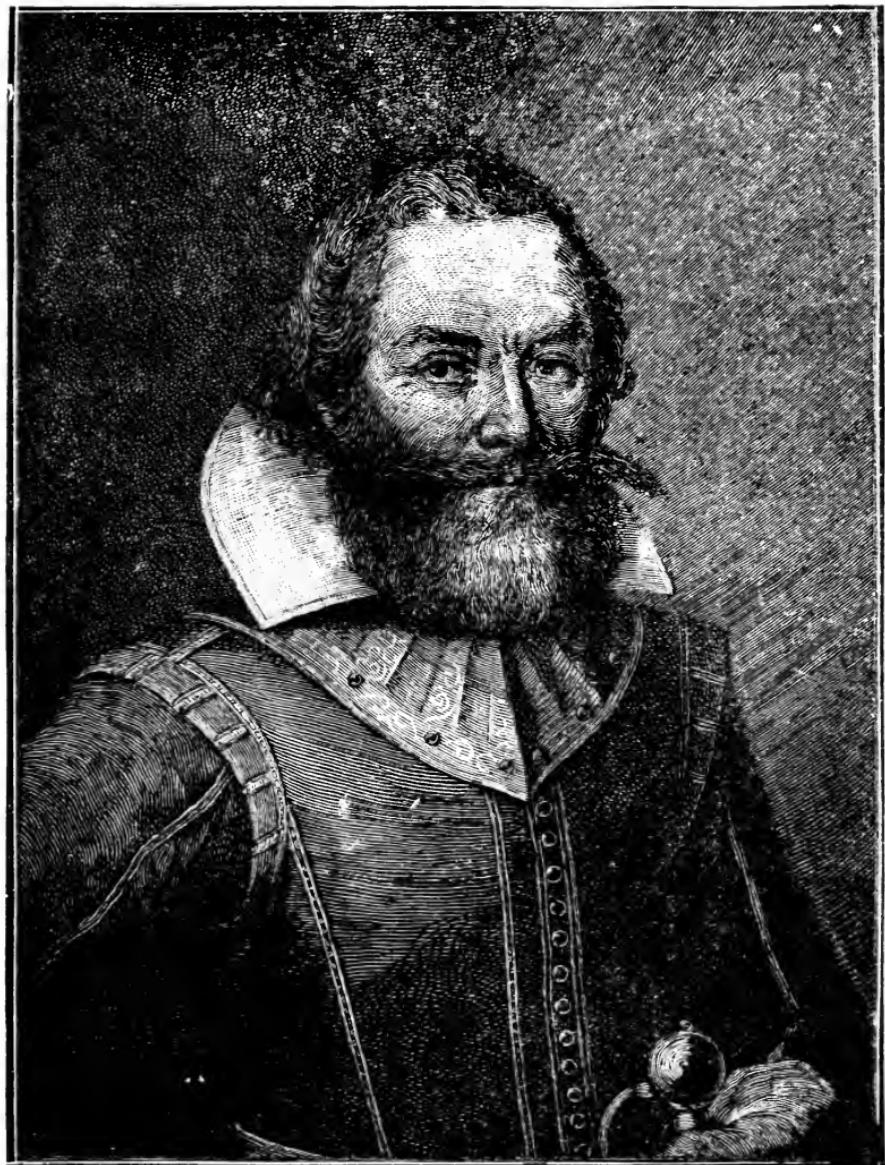
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When shall we say, then, that the literature began to grow? We all know that the world first heard of America through Christopher Columbus, but when he landed here he found no public libraries or bookstores among the business places of San Salvador, nor were the Indians reading school books or story books as they sat under the palm-trees or on the beach. In the old days stories and history were handed down not by books, but by the memories of the old men and women of the tribes, except such few records as were made, often in picture form, on the woven work or wood work of the Indians. Some of the tribe histories were kept in this way, and are interesting to those who have learned to understand them. Different kinds of lines and marks showed when wars or deaths had occurred, and odd pictures described special events of importance. In the records of one old tribe there is a rough sketch of a man with explosive-looking lines coming from his mouth. This was the year when a great epidemic of whooping-cough occurred among the Indians, and was the best picture they could think of to represent the terrible cough.

SOLOMON'S VISIT TO THE CAPITOL.

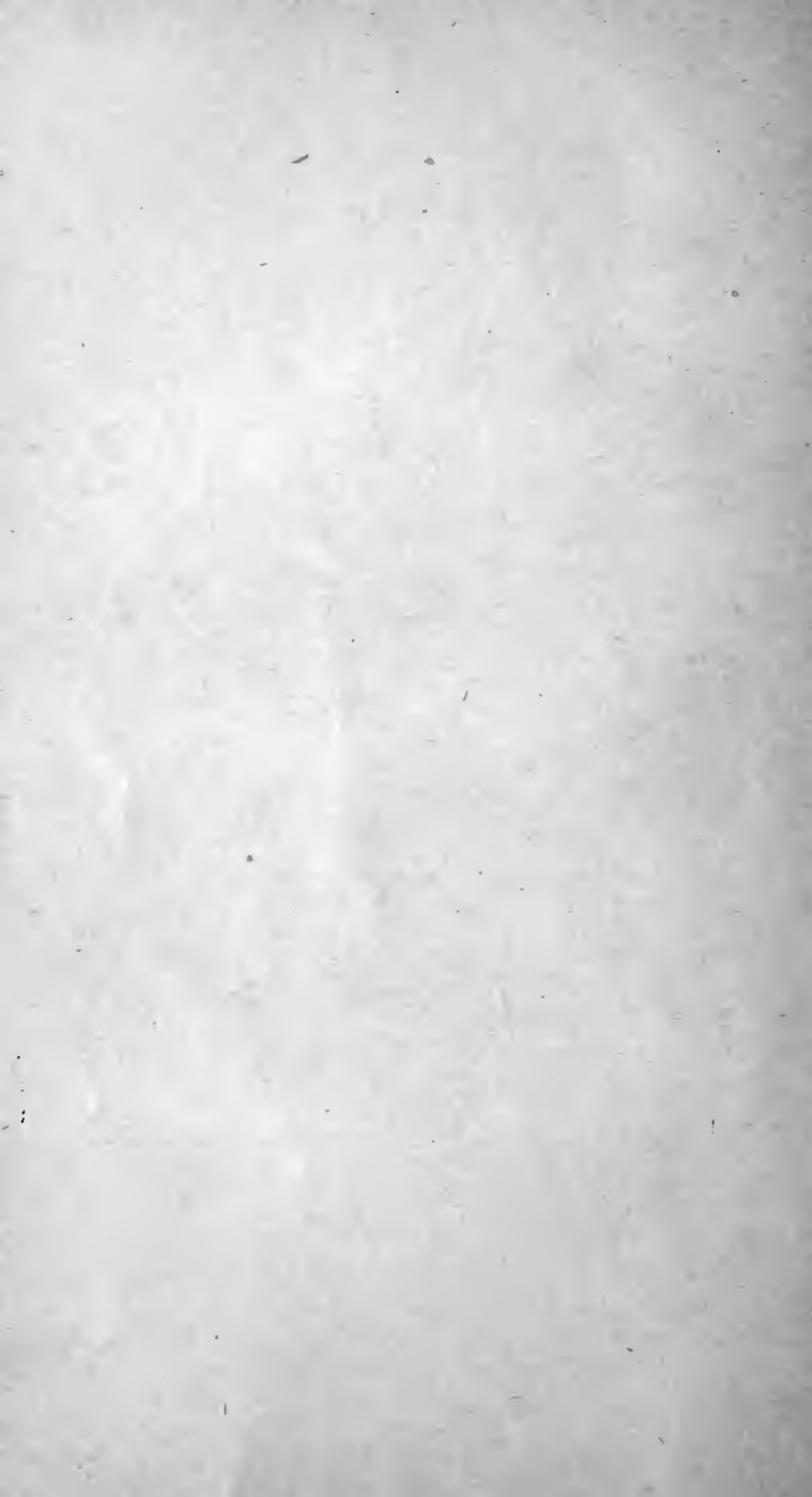
But of course we do not call all this literature. American literature began with the writings produced by the English settlers who came over long after Columbus had discovered the country; those whom we think of most as having settled on the coasts of New England and Virginia. And it will not be hard for us to see why there were not many books made in this country in those days. In the first place there were for a good while no printing-presses here; and in the second place the settlers were too busy to write. Some were fighting the Indians or making friends with them; others were building up the struggling towns or cultivating the fields in order to find food for their children, and the life was a hard one for years and years after the colonies had begun to be established.

One other thing for the same reason we will be quick to understand; that is that the writing which was done in those early days was of the kind which we should call travel or history. Those who had gone thousands of miles away from home to live in a wild new land wrote about what they saw there, and about the hap-



CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH.

(Born 1579 — Died 1632.)



SOLOMON'S VISIT TO THE CAPITOL.

penings in their villages. So we have "A true relation of such occurrences and accidents of note as hath happened in Virginia since the first planting of that colony," a book by the famous Captain John Smith, which was printed in London in 1608. It is in this volume that the old story of Pocahontas is told, and in this as well as many other incidents we are afraid that Captain Smith was acting a little more as a story-teller than a historian. We have, too, a "Journey to the Land of Eden," written by Colonel Byrd, a famous Virginia gentleman, in which "Eden" refers to what is now the State of North Carolina.

The New Englanders were far ahead of the Virginians in beginning to print their own books, and a press was set up at Cambridge in 1639 and an Almanac issued from it. The next year came the first English book printed on the continent, the old "Bay Psalm Book," a collection of the Psalms in rhyme, made by various New England clergymen. One of these clergymen was John Eliot, who twenty years later translated the entire Bible into the Algonquin language, the tongue of the Indians to

SOLOMON'S VISIT TO THE CAPITOL.

whom he had gone as a missionary. "Mamusse Wunneetupanatamwe Up-Biblum God naneeswe Nukkone Testament kah wonk Wusku Testament" was the name of the book. Copies of it are still preserved, but it is said that there is no longer any one living who can read it. John Eliot will always be remembered, not only as one who did a great literary work, but as one of the very few Americans who have ever troubled themselves very greatly to help our native Indians.

One interesting author who lived in Massachusetts about two hundred years ago was old Cotton Mather, a Puritan minister who wrote histories and religious books which have always since been connected in people's minds with those "Colonial days," as we call them. His writings would prove very dry and hard reading nowadays, but after all he was a jolly old fellow, and one can almost imagine him waddling down the streets of Boston, in his high collar and knee breeches, laughing to himself at some ponderous joke which had entered his mind. Once on a time, as he was walking in this way, when quite old and deaf, some wicked little

SOLOMON'S VISIT TO THE CAPITOL.

Boston street boys, seeing him near, were seized with the idea of doing a terrible thing. It is sometimes hard to imagine what mischief small boys of two hundred years ago would have enjoyed. These planned to run up behind the old minister, and shout into his ear as loudly as they could yell: "You're an old fool, Cotton!"

It was a fearful thing to do, and they started to run away from the dreadful consequences; but the old man turned around quietly, and leaned on his cane while he replied: "I know it, I know it. The Lord help thee and me to be wiser!"

In old musty libraries we find many well-worn books written in those early days, numbers of them by men whom now very few know anything about. Some of the early New England governors kept interesting diaries of the daily events of their lives, as many people do to-day; some of the ministers published very long sermons, which were good things to go to sleep under then, and are still more dull to read now. All these volumes it makes one feel old to handle and look into, especially if one thinks

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of the people in powdered wigs and knee breeches and three-cornered hats who walked over the same ground where we walk, in the days when this part of the world was young and little known, and only a few people who could read or write lived on a narrow strip of land between the forest and the sea.

We can see how, just as nowadays little writing or reading is done in a new and growing town on the Western prairies, where all the strength of the people is needed to build up their home, in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries few Americans made books of importance.

It is this same rapid growth that has always kept America a little behind her Mother England in what we call literature; but when she became independent and strong, men were soon found whose pens won the admiration of the world.

II.

THE REVOLUTIONARY WRITINGS.

I HAVE already told you, in the previous chapter, what a great number of books have been produced in our country, considering the short time since it was founded. We considered that few of these, however, were written in the very early days of its life, because the people were at that time so much engaged in settling and building up the new nation ; and we looked hastily at two or three of the old-time writers. This, we said, brought us down to the times of the Revolution.

But if we understand how the early efforts at colonization must have prevented work of this kind, how much more plainly did the struggles of the War of the Revolution, and the beginnings of the new Government ! Although the numbers and strength of the people had grown

THE REVOLUTIONARY WRITINGS.

more than they had thought possible, still they were few and weak, and a war with a great country like England was quite enough to occupy them, without giving them time to write stories or poems. But a certain kind of literature grew up about Revolutionary times, just as a certain kind had grown up about colonial times.

This was what is called “political” literature, and had to do altogether with the thoughts of men about the great questions which concerned our Government—whether we should be able to live if we were separated from England, and if so what kind of a nation we could set up.

So the Revolutionary writings are full of this sort of matter. There are the published speeches of the great orators of the time, such as Patrick Henry, whose speech ending “Give me liberty or give me death!” a good many of us have recited sometime at school. There were essays written by the great men of the time, which had as much weight as would articles written for the newspapers of this generation by Mr. Harrison, Mr. Cleveland or Mr. Blaine; more, indeed, for we do not

THE REVOLUTIONARY WRITINGS.

think so much of our greatest men now as they used to. Among the most important of these essays were a number of papers called the “Federalist,” published after the war was over and the now free people were quarreling over the new Government. Another very interesting class of writers were what are called the “Revolutionary satirists,” those who helped either the English or the colonists by writing comic rhymes in which they made great sport of their opponents. We would laugh in these days to think of mere rhymes taking any important part in politics, but then they were more widely read and more serious in their effects; now we see very little of such writing, except an occasional attempt at it in the newspapers during a presidential campaign. But we all know at least the tune of one of these old satires—“Yankee Doodle.”

We all know, too, the one greatest piece of literature of those times. It was written by Thomas Jefferson, and begins “When in the course of human events.” It was not written to be fine sounding, but to serve a great purpose, and a good many men lost their lives because

THE REVOLUTIONARY WRITINGS.

they not only read it but believed it. We still like to hear it read on the Fourth of July, when we have become a little tired of listening to our firecrackers and torpedoes ; while the manuscript copy hangs in a great case in the Department of State at Washington.

Anything which scholars now take to be true poetry was unknown among our writings until forty years after the Declaration of Independence ; but there was one great book (great in size, we mean) published in the time of which we are writing which is worth being remembered because men say it is the “only epic written in America.” Now it is a little hard to tell what a man means when he speaks of an “epic,” which is an old Greek word, and has suffered considerable abuse in its day ; but in general he means a long poem connected more or less with history, or what pretends to be history, and having some great man for its hero. Now a tolerably good writer, who lived in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Joel Barlow by name, said to himself : “Greece had a great epic poem about Achilles, Italy about Æneas, and if our new country is going to be as big as Greece

THE REVOLUTIONARY WRITINGS.

and Rome, she must have an epic too." Who but Columbus should be honored in this way? So the "Columbiad" was written, named in the same way that Virgil's "Æneid" had been. Most people have forgotten all about it by this time; and America seems so far to have gotten along nicely without a great epic of its own. We have been taking interest in different kinds of poetry; but it is worth noticing that a poem called "The Epic of Saul," written recently by Dr. W. C. Wilkinson, has taken its place as our second epic—to be remembered perhaps as long as the first one.

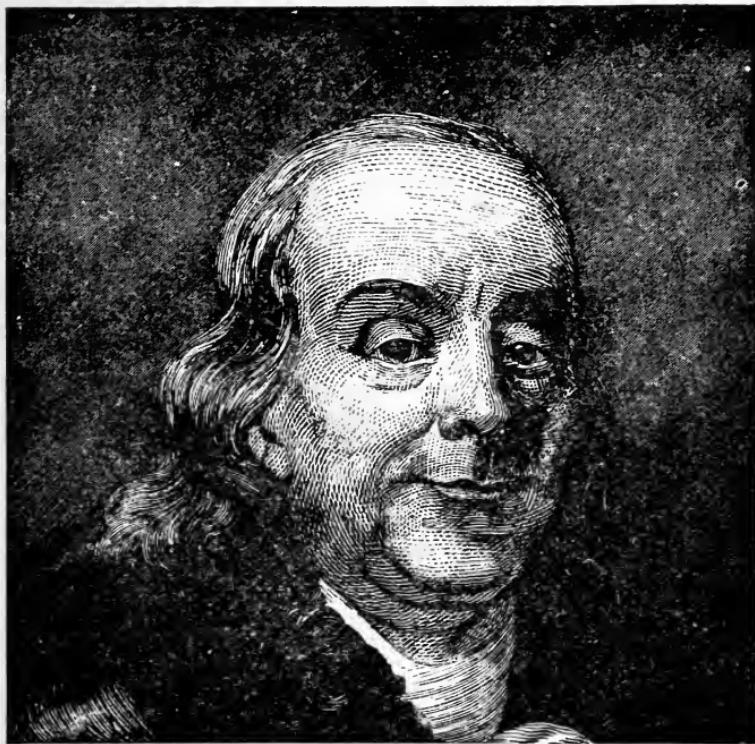
So much for a general glance at the writings of what we call the Revolutionary Period. We must now stop to look at a writer who belonged quite as much to colonial times as to these, dear old Benjamin Franklin, of Pennsylvania. We have all seen the picture of him as he performed his famous experiment with his kite, to find what the lightning was made of. His face is on many of our Government "greenbacks" in the Capitol at Washington, and again and again in places where our country has delighted to honor him. If we had space we could give

THE REVOLUTIONARY WRITINGS.

not only an entire paper, but a whole series of them, to him alone.

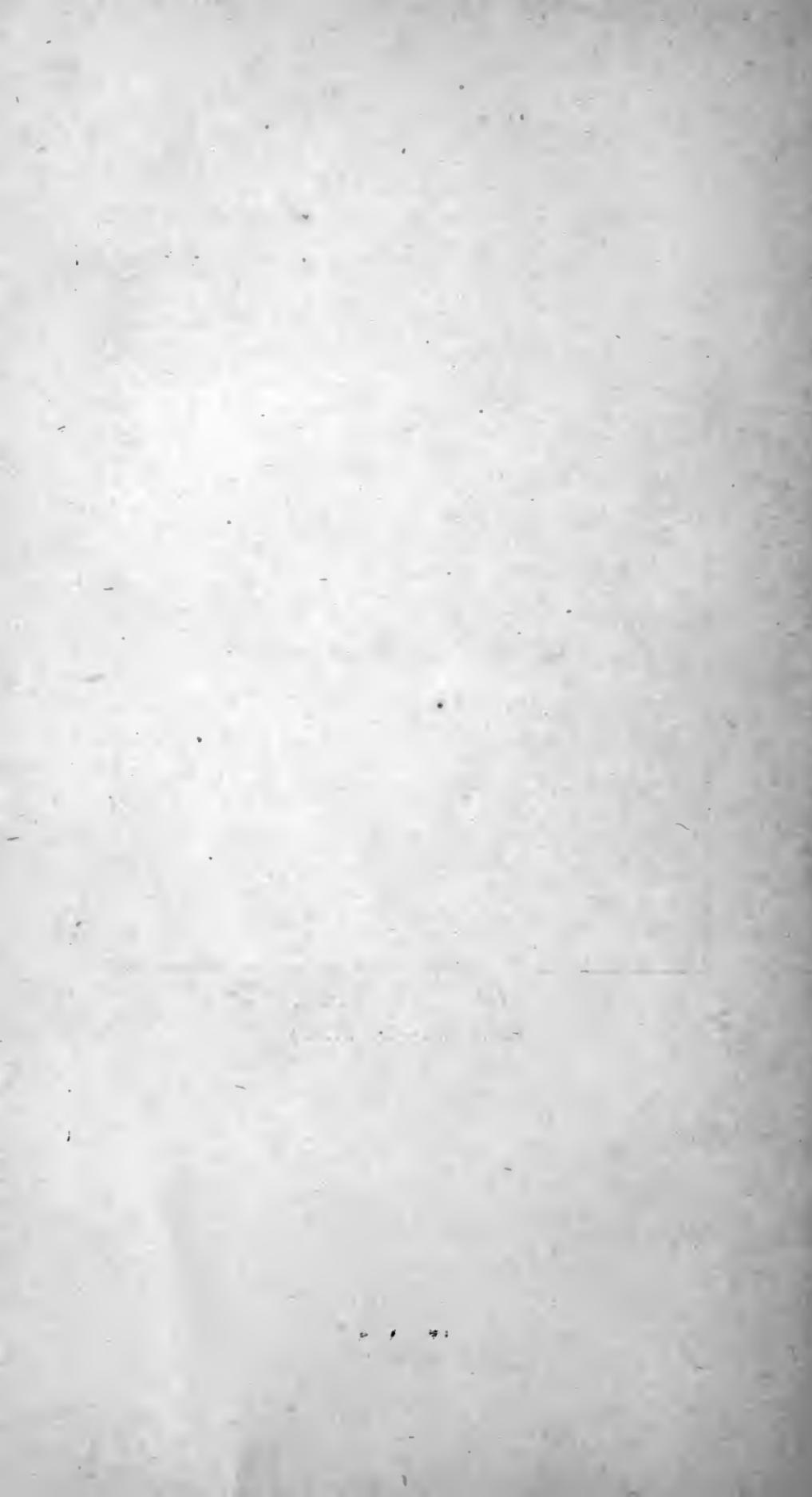
Franklin spent a great part of his life in helping along the people and Government of his adopted country, and it is not as a writer that we know or think the most of him. He started the Philadelphia fire department and the public library, the University of Pennsylvania, the first American magazine — called “The General Magazine and Historical Chronicle” — he signed the Declaration of Independence and the new Constitution; he went to both England and France as ambassador from our country, and he earned the respect and love of almost all who saw him. A great Frenchman wrote an epigram about him (by epigram we mean a big idea in a little dress), which reads, when it is translated: “He snatched the lightning from Heaven and the scepter from tyrants.” In this he referred, of course, to his experiments with electrical science, and his love of liberty.

We do not hear so much of his literary work, because it was not so important or so worthy to be remembered; but there is much of it



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

(Born 1706 — Died 1790.)



THE REVOLUTIONARY WRITINGS.

which we should enjoy reading over nowadays. His most interesting writings were in “Poor Richard’s Almanac,” a kind of annual almanac which he issued for nearly twenty-five years. It had all sorts of wise sayings and quaint proverbs in it, many of which have come down to us and to our daily use. “Little strokes fell great oaks;” “Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise;” “Never leave that till to-morrow which you can do to-day,” are some of these. The Almanac contained too, “Rules of Health,” “Plan for Saving One Hundred Thousand Pounds,” “The Way to Make Money Plenty in Every Man’s Pocket”—bits of advice for young men worthy of a good deal of practice in 1732 and in 1892 alike.

Benjamin Franklin wrote, also, his own biography, in a most charming and interesting style, and a good many stories from this are familiar to those of us who may know nothing of the book, such as that of the “man who had an axe to grind.”

- In all stories of his life we shall find many bright little anecdotes which will help us to

THE REVOLUTIONARY WRITINGS.

understand how wise and how kind this great man was.

It is no more easy to tell when one literary period begins and another ends than it is to tell when a little fellow, who can say a good many big words and do a good many wonderful things, outdoors and in, stops being a baby and becomes a Boy with a capital B; but we have to stop somewhere, and so our next chapter takes up the literature of the New Nation, and the first man who ever came to be known over the world as an American who had written books which were well worth reading.

III.

WASHINGTON IRVING.

WE have already spoken of the literature which grew up about the Revolutionary War, of the Declaration of Independence, of one or two poems of small value, and especially of the writings of Benjamin Franklin. We promised ourselves that this time we should hear of the first man who came to be known as an American who had written books of real worth.

This man was Washington Irving. He is not read very widely at the present time, but yet he is the first American writer whom we read for pleasure, and not from any curiosity to see what books were written in those days. What makes us think even more of him is that he was the first American writer whose work was thought highly of in England. Up to his time our English cousins laughed at the idea of

WASHINGTON IRVING.

any really fine literature coming from this side the ocean; since his success they have known us better.

It is a question, indeed, whether the earliest writings accomplished in our own country are to be called English or American; for, although they were written here, their authors were so lately from the mother country that their work was in no way different from what it would have been in their old home. By this we mean that it was no different in its language or style, though the subjects would be affected by the strange things in this land.

So Irving was, in a good many respects, an English writer. He traveled and even lived in Great Britain for a number of years; and he loved the old English customs, such as their Christmas celebrations and their country life. He loved the oldness everywhere which he missed in his native land — the gray stone churches with the ivy growing over them, and the houses with memories of hundreds of years about them. He was rested by such things, as one is rested nowadays in going from a new village where the houses and fences are of the



WASHINGTON IRVING.

(Born 1783 — Died 1859.)



WASHINGTON IRVING.

latest style, and the grass and trees set out and made to order, to some old town where the trees are old and dignified, and the houses have settled down to a quiet life years ago.

Irving's writings fill a wide space when set all together on the bookshelves. Among them are some large historical works, with biographies of Columbus, George Washington, Mohammed and Oliver Goldsmith. A very interesting group is made up of his writings about old Spain, where he spent some time. But perhaps the best is the famous "Sketch-Book." Let us read what he says at the beginning of it:

"I was always fond of visiting new scenes, and observing strange characters and manners. Even when a mere child I began my travels, and made many tours of discovery into foreign parts and unknown regions of my native city, to the frequent alarm of my parents, and the emolument of the town crier. As I grew into boyhood I extended the range of my observations. My holiday afternoons were spent in rambles about the surrounding country. I made myself familiar with all its places famous in history or fable. I knew every spot where a murder or robbery had been committed, or a ghost seen. I visited the neighboring villages, and added greatly to my stock of knowledge by noting their habits and customs, and conversing with their sages and great men. I even journeyed one long summer's day to the summit of the most distant hill, whence I stretched my eye over many a mile of unknown country, and was astonished to find how vast a globe I inhabited."

WASHINGTON IRVING.

He then goes on to say that as he grew older he was able to explore not only the country about his home, but lands across the sea; and that as artists bring home sketch-books filled with pictures of what they have seen, so his "Sketch-Book" was a little collection of interesting things which he had met with in his travels.

There are many pretty sketches in it, showing that he never forgot his boyish habit of keeping his eyes and ears open to some purpose in his wanderings. And there is one which we must refer to because we all know it already. Nothing else than the story of sleepy old Rip Van Winkle, to be sure. Irving pretended that it was written by an old Dutchman called Diedrich Knickerbocker, and he adds this note at the end :

"The Kaatsberg or Catskill Mountains have always been a region full of fable. The Indians considered them the abode of spirits who influenced the weather, spreading sunshine or clouds over the landscape, and sending good or bad hunting seasons. They were ruled by an old squaw spirit, said to be their mother. She dwelt on the highest peak of the Catskills, and had charge of the doors of day and night to open and shut them at the proper hour. She hung up the new moons in the skies, and cut up the old ones into stars. In times of drought, if properly propitiated, she would spin light summer clouds

WASHINGTON IRVING.

out of cobwebs and morning dew, and send them off from the crest of the mountain, flake after flake, like flakes of carded cotton, to float in the air, until, dissolved by the heat of the sun, they would fall in gentle showers, causing the grass to spring, the fruits to ripen, and the corn to grow an inch an hour. If displeased, however, she would brew up clouds black as ink, sitting in the midst of them like a bottle-bellied spider in the midst of its web; and when these clouds broke, woe betide the valleys!"

It was Irving's greatest charm that, sitting in his beautiful "Sunnyside" on the Hudson, he gathered the old Dutch legends about the river and its surroundings, and wove them into literature for all to read. Such literature we call "local," because of its connection with particular places; and since the early part of the century a great deal of it has been produced, having to do with all the various parts of our great country. Those of us who read much in the magazine stories of to-day will notice that for a few years past there has been a very tiresome custom of publishing great numbers of stories whose scenes are in the Southern States. There is always likely to be some tendency of this kind; and it was Irving who made famous the beautiful Hudson country of New York State.

WASHINGTON IRVING.

It was in the first years of the century that his work became well-known; and in those days people had more time for writing and reading than we have nowadays, just as they had longer journeys to take, and preached longer sermons. They used longer words and sentences, and to-day they seem a little tiresome to us, because we are always in a hurry, and demand that when any one has a story to tell he shall tell it as quickly as possible, if he wants any one to read it.

This is the case with Washington Irving; for, although his language was remarkably fine, and his thoughts entertaining, if he could come to life again as an unknown writer his sketches and stories would come back from the newspapers with the word “unavailable” on them; and if any editor paused to tell him what was the matter, he would say, “You are too slow, and use too big words for an American of 1893.” Just like him in this respect, only a great many times worse in his style, was a good story-teller who lived at the same time with Irving—James Fenimore Cooper. He was one of the first to write stories of sailor

WASHINGTON IRVING.

life and Indian life, and though there are many stupid things about his books, they have always been read with some interest for the exciting tales which they contain. It is said that they were published in thirty-four different places in Europe as soon as he produced them, and were scattered all over the world. Many of us may already have read "The Spy," "Leatherstocking Tales," "The Pilot," "Red Rover" or "The Last of the Mohicans." The stories are sometimes good to read when one curls up in the corner of the sofa on a rainy day; but ours of to-day are more brisk and strong, and the best of them much worthier of reading.

IV.

HAWTHORNE AND EMERSON.

WE have talked of Washington Irving, and how he was the first American to be recognized as a great writer. We saw what is meant by “local” literature, and how the story-tellers of the early part of this century wrote in a different style from those of to-day. Among these we spoke of James Fenimore Cooper.

So far we have tried to talk about our literature in the order in which it was written, beginning with the very earliest writings of America; but now it will be hard for us to follow this plan. We might say that Fenimore Cooper’s books were most popular at about the year 1840; at the same time other prominent writers were interesting the people, and from that day to this these overlap one another in

HAWTHORNE AND EMERSON.

the order of time, so that it would be almost as hard to arrange them and mark them "first," "second" and "third," as it would to do the same thing with the threads of a carpet.

The beautiful town of Concord, Mass., has been the home of many famous literary people, and it was there that Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was born in 1803, and who is thought to be our greatest American philosopher, lived and wrote. Now philosophers are very wise men, who know a great deal about certain things, and very little about certain other things, and whom it is almost always extremely hard to understand. So we shall find that Mr. Emerson's "Essays," which are the chief part of his writings, will not be interesting until we begin to know and think a good deal; and many people who are old enough to be wise are just as little able to discover what Mr. Emerson and the other Transcendentalists mean, as when they were little children. Transcendentalists is the big word given to the particular group of philosophers to which Mr. Emerson belonged.

But although his writings were chiefly of the character of essays, he also wrote not a little

HAWTHORNE AND EMERSON.

beautiful poetry, so that by some people he is thought to be one of the very best of our poets. His hymn which was sung at the dedication of the soldiers' monument at Concord, in which he tells of the "embattled farmers" who "fired the shot heard round the world," is one of his best.

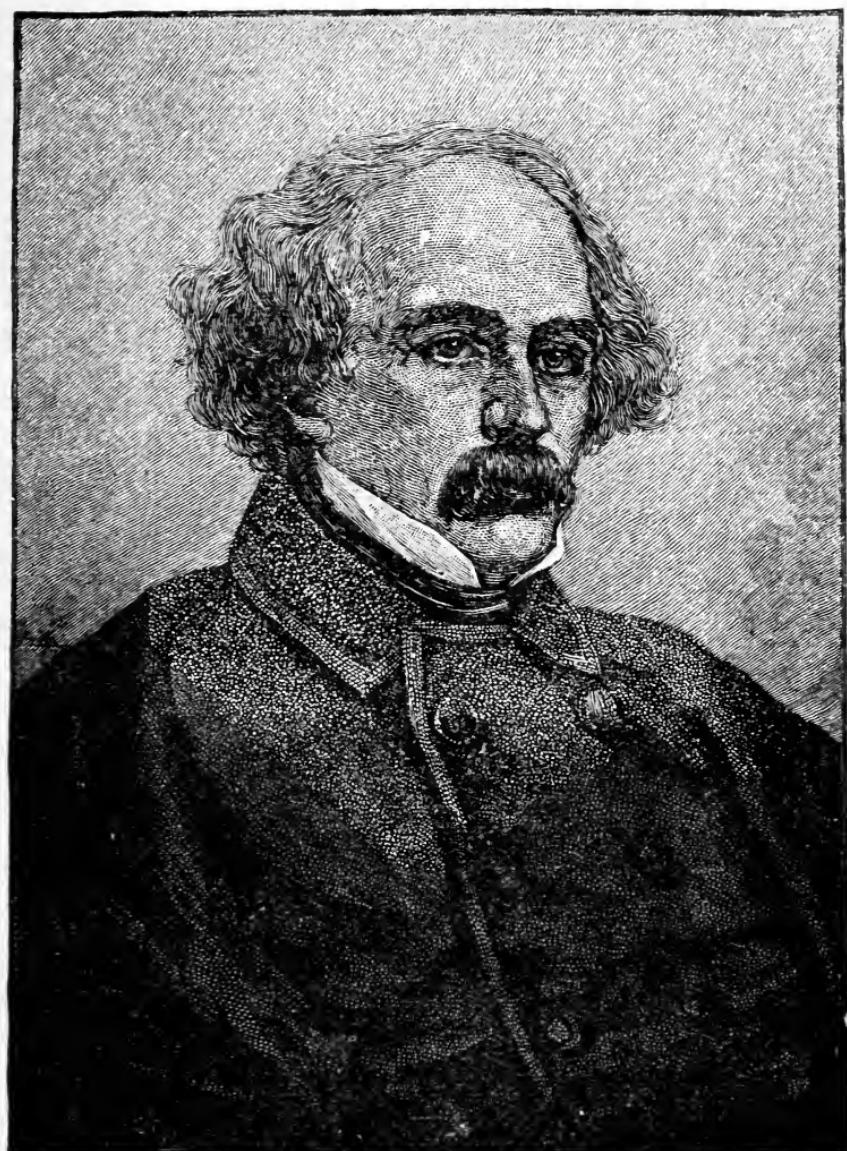
And here is a verse about the "humblebee" that will interest us :

"Aught unsavory or unclean
Hath my insect never seen;
But violets and bilberry bells,
Maple-sap and daffodils,
Grass with green flag half-mast high,
Succory to match the sky,
Columbine with horn of honey,
Scented fern and agrimony,
Clover, catchfly, adder's-tongue,
And brier roses dwelt among."

How many of these plants and flowers are those of us who are Yankees familiar with?

We must not leave Emerson without glancing at his little "Fable," which shows how a philosopher can sometimes put a big thought in very simple words :

"The mountain and the squirrel
Had a quarrel,
And the former called the latter "little prig."
Bun replied,



NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.

(Born 1804 — Died 1864.)



HAWTHORNE AND EMERSON.

“ You are doubtless very big,
But all sorts of things and weather
Must be taken in together
To make up a year,
And a sphere.
And I think it no disgrace
To occupy my place.
If I’m not so large as you,
You are not so small as I,
And not half so spry.
I’ll not deny you make
A very pretty squirrel track;
Talents differ; all is well and wisely put;
If I cannot carry forests on my back,
Neither can you crack a nut.”

But the great Concord story-teller whom old and young still love was Nathaniel Hawthorne, born just a year after Emerson. “ Wayside ” was his home at Concord, and our readers will be interested to know that this has been for some time the home of the family of the well-known American publisher, the late Mr. Daniel Lothrop.

Hawthorne was for some time a Government officer at the Custom House in the old city of Salem, and in the first part of “ The Scarlet Letter ” he describes his surroundings while there with such truthfulness, that when the book was published many Salem people could pick out the people of whom he spoke. This

HAWTHORNE AND EMERSON.

book, “The House of the Seven Gables,” “The Marble Faun” and “Twice Told Tales” are, perhaps, his best-known writings. His stories, while they were not about ghosts or fairies, had something airylike and ghostlike about very many of them, so that they do not give us the feeling that the things in them really happened ; but they are perhaps all the more interesting for that. He was far enough back in the century to have about him a touch of that same “wordiness” that we spoke of in our last paper. But there is no need of saying that we must read Hawthorne, for we are all glad enough to do it. Two of his books, the “Wonder Book” and “Tanglewood Tales,” were written especially for young folks, and very many of his stories, like that of the “Great Stone Face” in the mountain, are equally interesting.

Hawthorne was a handsome man, and, what was better, a good and lovable one. His son Julian, who is also an author, has written a charming story of the life of both father and mother, which is very entertaining reading. In Concord and Salem there are still many re-

HAWTHORNE AND EMERSON.

minders of the one who helped to make them famous. Some one says: "If you go out for a stroll about Salem, you will inquire for the town pump" (which Hawthorne wrote of), "and for the House of the Seven Gables, where poor old Hepsibah set out the little store of toys in the shop window, and where Phœbe flitted about like a butterfly. . . . As for the Custom House, there it is, real and tangible, with the old decaying wharf stretching down in front. Somebody will show you where Hawthorne purported to discover the manuscript of the 'Scarlet Letter,' and if you ask, you will be told where you must go to see the old desk at which he wrote."

V.

THE “CHILDREN’S POET.”

THE town of Cambridge is especially famous as the home of Harvard College.

Here lived for many years the poet whom all Americans, or at least all American children, best love. He was glad to be known as the “children’s poet” the world over.

Because we know so much of Longfellow already, we shall need to learn the less about him. He was born in Maine, in 1807, and graduated from college in the same class with Mr. Hawthorne; he became known to the public by his writings perhaps a little earlier than his classmate. For a long time Mr. Longfellow taught in Harvard College, winning the love and admiration of all his students. He wrote some books in prose, especially during his early life; but of course it is as a poet that we think

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of him first of all. We shall find that people are by no means agreed in calling him our greatest poet (America is not yet old enough to know who of her children are greatest), but every one knows that he is the best loved. Poetry is apt to be hard reading. Poets take liberties which we grant to nobody else, and say things which it seems as though they can scarcely understand themselves ; but there was nothing about this in Mr. Longfellow. His poems are like the best poetry in their musicalness, and like the best prose in their clearness.

All his life long he wrote, improving a little, perhaps, all the time. His greatest works are “*Hiawatha*,” “*The Courtship of Miles Standish*,” “*Evangeline*,” “*The Golden Legend*,” and a translation of the great Italian poem of Dante. “*Hiawatha*” is an odd story of the American Indians, and is written in a style and a meter quite unlike any other English poem. “*Miles Standish*” and “*Evangeline*” are both American stories ; the one of colonial days in New England, the other of the Acadian peasants of Nova Scotia. The meter of these two works is also interesting, as they served to give

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it a genuine place in our language. It is called the "hexameter," or "six-measure," and is the great measure of the old Greek and Roman poems; but it was reserved for Longfellow to show how beautiful it could be made in English. It is never used with rhyme. We can easily get an idea of it by repeating the lines:

"As ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing,
Only a signal shown, and a distant voice in the darkness;
So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one another,
Only a look and a voice, then darkness again and a silence."

These lines give us an idea, too, of more than Longfellow's meter; they show his way of thinking. He could not see the river rushing by under the bridge, or the shadows on the path in the moonlight, or any of the beautiful things of nature, without comparing them with higher things. His purpose was always to help; and when he told the beautiful old legends of which he was so fond, we shall always find an ending which, although it is not labeled "Moral," tells us what Mr. Longfellow thought was the lesson of the story. One of the best of such poems is "Sandalphon:"

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‘How, erect, at the outermost gates
Of the City Celestial, he waits,
With his feet on the ladder of light,
That, crowded with angels unnumbered,
By Jacob was seen, as he slumbered
Alone in the desert at night.

“Serene in the rapturous throng,
Unmoved by the rush of the song,
With eyes unimpassioned and slow,
Among the dead angels, the deathless
Sandalphon stands listening breathless
To the sounds that ascend from below.

“And he gathers the prayers as he stands,
And they change into flowers in his hands,
Into garlands of purple and red;
And beneath the great arch of the portal,
Through the streets of the City Immortal,
Is wafted the fragrance they shed.”

No better selection than this could be made to illustrate the musicalness which we spoke of as one of Longfellow's great characteristics.

But the best thing which we can tell about this great man (or any other great man) is that he was thoroughly good. It was for this that his own children and all other children loved him, and that every one mourned for the sad losses which he had. Most of us know his poem, “The Children's Hour,” in which he writes of his own home life with his little ones.

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It was after the death of one of these that the beautiful "Resignation" appeared, beginning:

"There is no flock, however watched and tended,
But one dead lamb is there.

There is no fireside, howsoe'er defended,
But has one vacant chair."

At his fine old house in Cambridge, Mr. Longfellow was always at home to every one, young and old. He would receive all visitors himself, and show them "the old clock on the stair," and the other interesting things in the house. He never refused his autograph to any request (and this is a virtue which no celebrated person, short of a saint, is ever credited with); he paused continually in his work to write helpful letters to friends and strangers who had asked advice or assistance; and so far was he from wishing to hide from the crowds who longed to see him, that he would sit in his study in the evening, with the room lighted and the curtains drawn. Some one has said that it may be truly said of him, as it was of the Saviour, that "he went about doing good." It is recorded that when he was spoken of as a member of the Board of Visitors of



CORNER IN LONGFELLOW'S STUDY.

(In the Poet's Home, Cambridge.)



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Harvard College, the president said: "What would be the use? Longfellow could never be brought to find fault with anybody or anything."

In his appearance he was very attractive, so that Charles Kingsley, the great English writer, said that Longfellow's face was the most beautiful human face that he had ever seen. We have already spoken of the love which the people of England had for him, and still feel. When he died, in 1882, not only all America mourned, but his friends across the sea; and in Westminster Abbey, which we have so often spoken of as the last resting-place of the great English authors, he was not left without a memorial. It is a beautiful thing to know that the last line of poetry which he wrote was:

"It is daybreak everywhere!"

Perhaps this is a good place in which to speak of the character of poets. They are generally supposed to be somewhat differently made from other people, and their work leads them to such high thoughts and feelings that when we admire their writings we are generally right in admiring the men themselves. Yet it

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is a very common thing for a man's poetry to be any number of times better than himself; and writers have certain faults peculiarly their own, like any other class of people. Sometimes they think they are too big to have much to do with other people; sometimes they think that nothing amounts to much which does not agree with their own work; sometimes, saddest of all, their poetry is one thing, and their lives quite another.

Therefore America can well be proud of having as her most popular poet a man who was no whit below his best thoughts. When Mr. Longfellow wrote of love, he was loving; when he taught of trust, he trusted God himself; and his life is a precious memory to all who knew him. When people tell us that, though he may be popular, his work is all too simple, and will die for lack of depth, let us reply, the children know better than that; for one who is truly a "children's poet" never dies.

VI.

INTERESTING HISTORIANS.

BEFORE we go on with the more interesting writers we must look for a little at some books which are perhaps not such pleasant reading as our favorite — poetry.

These are our histories. Those which we use in school make rather dull work for us often-times, because they put so many things in so small a space, and have so many hard dates in them. But all histories are not stupid, as we have probably already found out. When the volumes of Lord Macaulay's "History of England" were published, every one bought them and read them as eagerly as we do magazine stories nowadays.

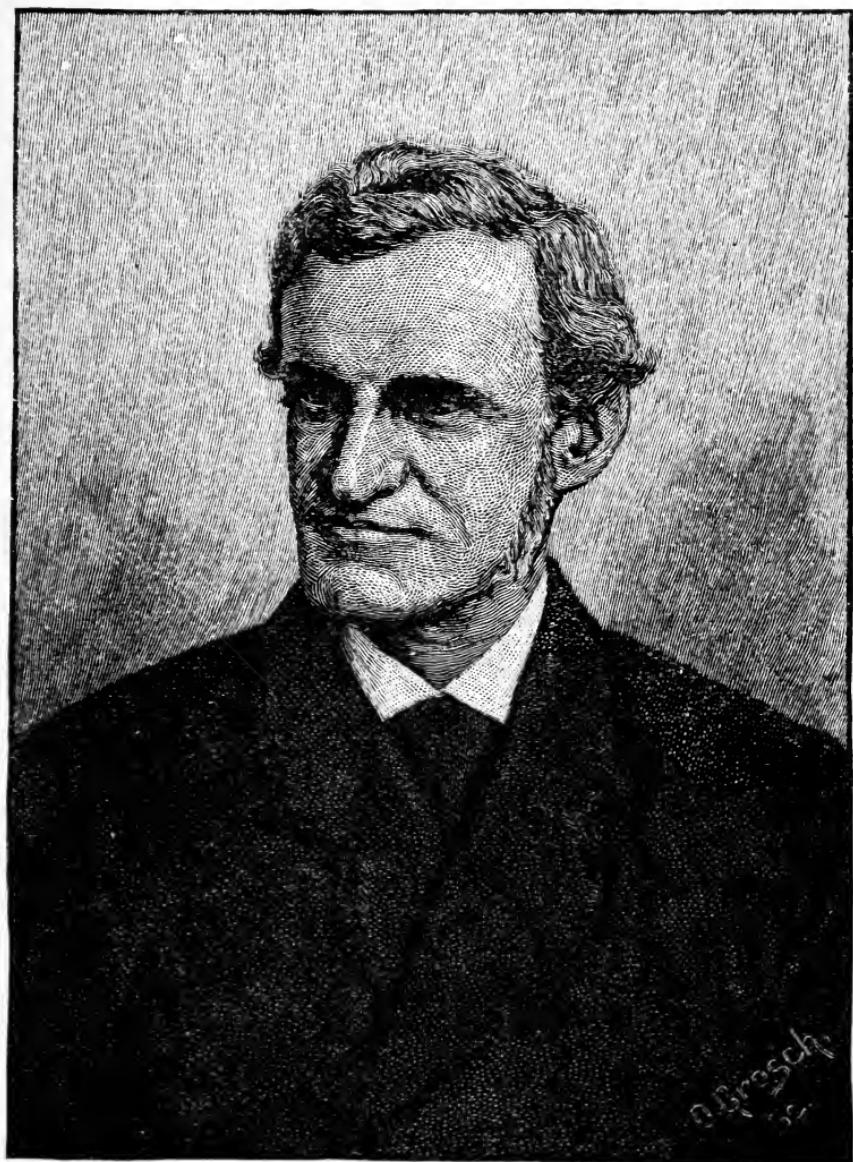
It is true that in America we have had no one like Macaulay; yet there has been one American whose histories read like fairy stories.

INTERESTING HISTORIANS.

This man was Mr. Motley—John Lothrop Motley—who died about sixteen years ago, and who wrote the great Dutch histories, the “Rise of the Dutch Republic,” and the “History of the United Netherlands.” Those of us who know anything at all of the story of the queer old country, with its dykes and windmills and canals, can understand how interesting these books might be; and in writing them Mr. Motley gained the name of being our greatest historian, though another man has been perhaps more prominent than he, since this one wrote of his own country. We mean Mr. Bancroft, who is probably the only man in no way connected with the Government whom our national Congress has given a resolution of thanks.

Such people are admitted to the floor of Congress, and old Mr. Bancroft used to be seen there at inauguration ceremonies, and on other great occasions.

The thanks were rendered for the great “History of the United States,” the last volume of which was issued just fifty years after the first one. It makes one positively tired to



FRANCIS PARKMAN.
(Born 1823 — Died 1893.)



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think of a book which took half a century to be written! As a story, this is by no means so interesting as Mr. Motley's writings; but its author was so painstaking and accurate that it is the "standard," as we say, on its subject. Mr. Bancroft was born in 1800, and died when about ninety years old, having been Secretary of the Navy, Minister to England and to Germany, and having won the great respect and admiration of all Americans. There are not many people, we may be sure, who undertake a fifty-year job.

Two other American historians have made themselves famous, Prescott and Parkman. Mr. Prescott, who died more than thirty years ago, wrote thrilling histories of the hazy fairy-like regions of Mexico and South America. "The Conquest of Mexico" and "Conquest of Peru" are said to have sent many an adventurous boy down to the Southern countries to hunt for remains of the old Aztec and Spanish tales; and the discoveries that will lighten up many mysterious bits of history or story are still to be made. Francis Parkman is a much later writer than Prescott, and has written of

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our own country's history, most of all in its relation to Indian and Canadian affairs. His books, too, like Motley's and Prescott's, have much of the excitement and brightness of stories about them; so that, after all, our histories are not dull reading unless we are so unfortunate as to think a thing dull for the very reason that it actually happened.

Of course these are not all the Americans who have written good histories, but Prescott, Motley, Bancroft and Parkman may be called our Big Historical Four. Others will come up when we talk of men whose books have only lately become known; these four are classic.

And now that we have used this word, this may be a good place to ask what we mean by "classic," a good word which is nowadays much used and much misused. It began by meaning anything which belonged to one of the high "classes" of the Roman people, and later was applied to things of a high character in any department. But the important thing to remember is, that books and music cannot be well said to be classic until they have lived long enough to receive the good opinion of

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more than one set of people. We do not need to be told that there appears a book every now and then which has a great sale for a year or two, and then is remembered no more; so it will not do for a publisher to announce that he has just issued a “classic”; the most he can say is that he hopes it will prove to be one in the long years to come. Of course when people commonly speak of the “classics” they mean the old writings of the great Greeks and Romans, because these have endured for so many hundreds of years, and are as interesting as ever to each new set of readers.

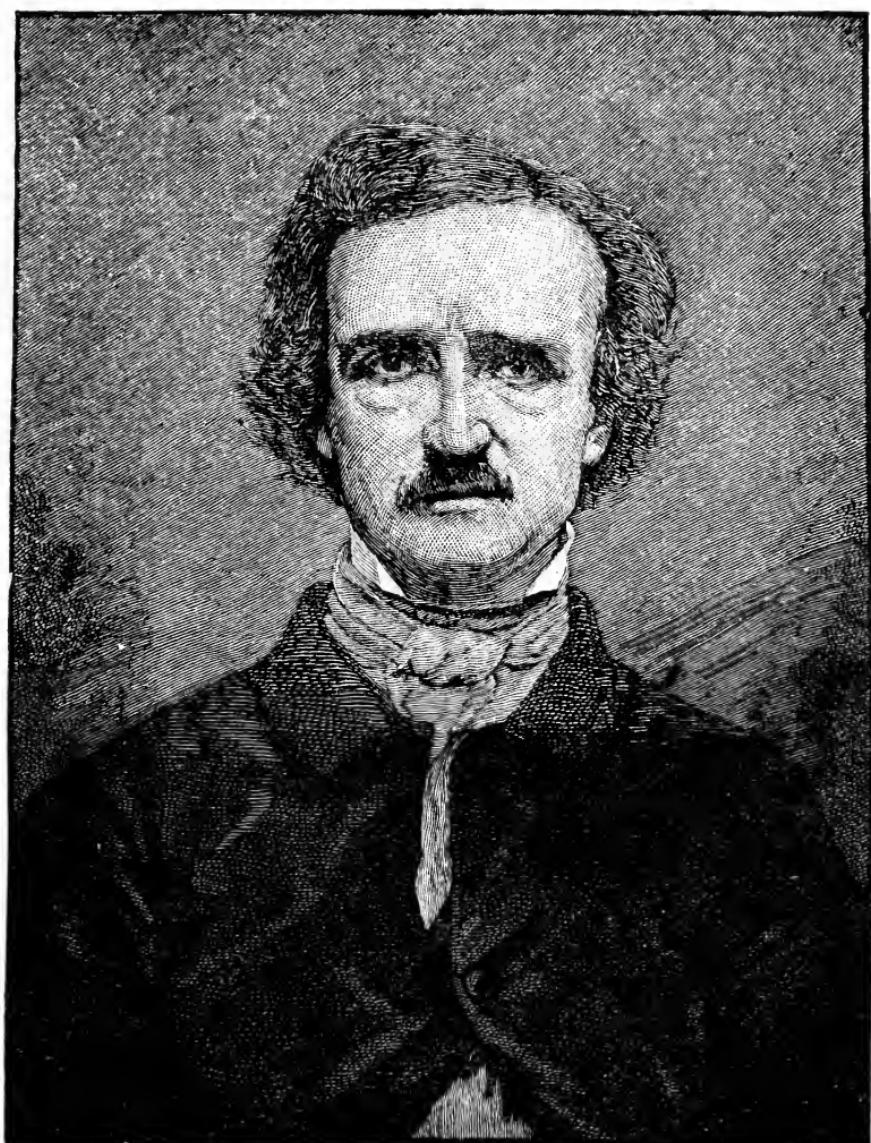
Perhaps ninety-nine out of every hundred books written are, from their very nature, made to live but a few years. They have to do with people and ways of living which belong only to the time at which they are published, and when those people and ways of living have passed away they are no longer pleasant reading, unless they happen to be curiosities for some reason. So when a book is loved and re-read by different kinds of people for a great number of years, we may be sure it has something to do with what is called human nature — the

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thoughts and feelings of men which are always the same, no matter where you look for them. There is no American book, no matter how much we may like it, which we can say has yet proved itself to be of this kind, simply because our very oldest writings have only been alive for something like one or two hundred years.

Now we will talk for a moment (not because he has any connection with what has just been said, but because he goes with no special class of writers, and may as well come in here as anywhere) of an odd writer who was living about fifty years ago, and who is remembered chiefly by just one poem. His name was Edgar Allan Poe, and the poem is the famous “Raven.”

Mr. Poe lived only forty years, and his story is a sad one, like that of very few of our well-known writers. He began badly as a boy, leading a hard and rough life, though he had plenty of opportunities to make the most of himself; and he died at a public hospital of a disease caused only by drunkenness. “Wonderful talent wasted,” is what we have to say of him.



EDGAR ALLEN POE.

Born 1809 — Died 1849.)



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There is more prose remaining from Poe's pen than poetry; and in both there is a great deal that is wild and ghostly and mysterious. What this writer wanted was not, like Longfellow, to help everybody, but to impress everybody with his power; indeed, we might say to puzzle or to scare everybody; and in his way he succeeded.

There are a number of horrible "ghost" and "detective" stories, like the "Black Cat," which is a good thing to read at night-time, when one wants to be made afraid to go to bed alone.

Poe was a very careful writer, and knew how to put in all the little words and expressions which would give just the results that he wanted.

Some of his poetry is very beautiful, without anything ghostly or ghastly in it; but the "Raven," as we have seen, is the famous work of his which every one thinks of on hearing his name.

He tells us in one of his essays that he wrote this, not in any serious or despairing mood; but that he planned everything about

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it which should give that impression with as much exactness as though it were the plan of a house which he was to draw. This is very likely.

We are apt to think that poets write what they do just from some rush of feeling which comes over them, and “inspires” them to either solemn or gay verses; but it is quite probable that they often go about their work in much the same careful way that other people do. We might notice right here that there is pretty good authority for the statement that even Lord Tennyson used a “rhyming dictionary” in writing some of his poetry.

If we are not familiar with the “Raven” already, it will be a good poem to examine just on account of its style. We could take a single stanza, and ask what particular words and what strange things about the meter and rhyme serve to give it just the effect which it has.

There are few stanzas more interesting in all our literature than this last one; and it is a good example of the fact that, in poetry especially, we may often be pleased and interested

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with what we cannot in the least understand. It is by no means necessary to see through everything in order to like it.

“ And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting,
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is
dreaming,
And the lamplight o’er him streaming throws his shadow
on the floor,
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the
floor
Shall be lifted — nevermore!”

VII.

POETRY AND SONG.

IF Washington Irving was the first of our prose writers who was well known in other countries, Mr. William Cullen Bryant was our first poet of whom the same thing could be said. He was born thirteen years before Mr. Longfellow in Massachusetts, but is always thought of in connection with New York City. It was a strange thing that so great a poet should have devoted the large part of his work to a mere newspaper; but newspapers fifty years ago were perhaps more worthy of being called "literature" than they are to-day, and Mr. Bryant won the respect of every one as editor of the New York Evening Post.

So early did he begin to write that he was only nineteen or twenty when he finished his great poem, "Thanatopsis," and indeed there

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are still to be found numbers of songs and other sorts of writing which he produced when between eight and sixteen years old. We shall find that almost all of his poetry is of a serious and quiet kind; he did not become excited when writing, either in the way of jollity or severity, so that one critic said of him that his poems were so cold that they should always be bound in fur. This quality was not altogether caused by Mr. Bryant himself, but partly by the time in which he began to write. Nowadays a poet is expected not only to say sweet and musical things, but odd unusual ones, which will strike our attention and surprise us every now and then. This has not always been so, and so Mr. Bryant's work did not formerly seem as commonplace as much of it does now.

This "father of American poetry," as he has come to be called, wrote little of people or events, but instead almost always turned to the birds or the flowers, the sea, and especially the woods, for his friends and subjects. Like Longfellow, too, he would see little "morals" in whatever he wrote of, making sermons of many of his poems. Quite different from all

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this, however, was his most remarkable work, the translation of Homer's great epics, the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," into beautiful English verse.

In all which he wrote there was great beauty and smoothness of language, and in his thoughts great "majesty," as we frequently say — that is, something king-like, which we feel like admiring and reverencing.

It would not be fair to forget, too, some very bright verses of Mr. Bryant's. For instance, there is "Robert of Lincoln," the quaint name which he gave to the bobolink :

"Merrily swinging on brier and weed,
Near to the nest of his little dame,
Over the mountain side or mead,
Robert of Lincoln is telling his name:
Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;
Snug and safe is that nest of ours,
Hidden among the summer flowers.
Chee, chee, chee!"

It is too bad, but quite necessary, to crowd as many great names as we do into one small paper. For a moment or two we must speak of one which will take us back to old Cam-

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bridge again, Mr. James Russell Lowell, who at the time of his recent death was undoubtedly our greatest living poet. Not only poet, either, but teacher, essayist, lecturer, critic and statesman. All these names rightfully belong to this distinguished man. Whatever he undertook he seems to have done well, and this, too, in more than one kind of poetry. No matter what style we may prefer, we shall find it here.

Mr. Lowell lived at Cambridge as a professor in Harvard College, like Longfellow, and abroad as minister of our Government to foreign powers, like Irving and Bancroft and Motley. He seems to have been greatly loved by those who knew him best, and by almost all his readers. By far his most original literary work is contained in the "Biglow Papers," which were political satires such as we saw in Revolutionary times, written in the dialect of the New England country people. They became immensely popular throughout our country, and played quite an important part in some of the campaigns. They were supposed to be the work of a country fellow called Hosea Biglow, who sometimes wrote poems on other than

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political subjects, such as "The Courtin'." These papers are an important part of our literature, because they will always preserve in a classic form the dialect in which they were written.

It would be useless to try to tell anything, in this short space, of the beautiful things in Mr. Lowell's serious poetry. Perhaps his finest work can be found in "The Vision of Sir Launfal," and in the ode which he wrote after the War, in memory of the Harvard graduates who had fallen in battle. The passage in this ode beginning, "O, beautiful! my Country! ours once more!" is one of the finest things in our literature.

It is not so necessary to quote anything from this writer as from many, because every one wants to read him for himself, and because one could hardly select flowers from such a boundless garden. We should speak one word of Mr. Lowell's prose writings, which are chiefly in the line of essays, and which in their department are more certainly our best American work than the poetry of Lowell is in the other department.

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In taking a quick glance at our literature, as we are doing in these papers, it is not hard to choose the great names over which we must pause, but more difficult to be sure about the lesser ones.

But now as we are in the midst of poetry and song, we should think for a moment of Stephen Foster, who lived in both Pennsylvania and Ohio, and who wrote words that are well known wherever Americans live. Some of these are, "Nelly was a Lady," "My Old Kentucky Home," and "The Old Folks at Home" ("Suwanee River"). They are interesting because they are so thoroughly American, and although they are not, of course, very much in the way of literature, and are popular largely on account of the sweet tunes which have carried them everywhere, many of us would rather have written one of these, which everybody sings, than some great poem which only a few would love.

There have always been two classes of song writers: those who have preferred to write what every one else could enjoy, and those who have preferred work so good or so great

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as to be above a great mass of people. Of course neither one of these writers is to be despised.

We must stop for another moment at the name of Thomas Buchanan Read, who, like Foster, lived in Pennsylvania and Ohio between 1840 and 1860, and who wrote a number of unimportant poems. He wrote one, also, which ought not to be considered unimportant, since it is to be studied and enjoyed for its lovely language and flowing, lazy style. This is “Drifting,” a description of the famous harbor of Naples; and just as we chose some lines from Longfellow’s “Sandalphon” to illustrate his quality of “musicalness,” so let us choose these from Mr. Read:

“ My soul to-day
Is far away,
Sailing the Vesuvian bay;
My winged boat,
A bird afloat,
Swims round the purple peaks remote:

“ Round purple peaks
It sails, and seeks
Blue inlets, with their crystal creeks,

POETRY AND SONG.

Where high rocks throw,
Through deeps below,
A duplicated golden glow.

• • • • •
“I heed not, if
My rippling skiff
Float swift or slow from cliff to cliff;
With dreamful eyes
My spirit lies
Under the walls of Paradise.”

VIII.

ESSAYIST, POET AND NOVELIST.

EMERSON is the only really great American prose writer outside of the historians and the story-tellers, or in other words the only great American essayist. Yet there are a number of other men who have written charmingly in this line, and whose work is in some ways more solidly satisfactory than Mr. Emerson's, though not so handsomely done. One of the earliest of these was Bayard Taylor. We can talk of him with a clear conscience, for he was essayist, poet and novelist in one.

It was, indeed, as a poet that he most wished to be remembered; he began his literary work about fifty years ago, by printing a little volume of verses, and he complained in after life that while he wanted to be known as a poet, he was celebrated only as a traveler, a wanderer

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over the whole world. For his books of travel, eleven in number, and written from Europe, Asia, Africa and the islands of the sea, were what really introduced him to readers at home. In those days it was not possible, as it is now, for almost any one to take at least a short journey outside his own country; so (although nowadays there are few books of travel which should claim our attention, since we can see so much better with our own eyes than with other people's) Taylor's letters from strange countries, charmingly written as they were, proved a success. His poetry was much of it very good, too, and the great amount of his literary work in many different directions is one of the most interesting things to remember about him.

Mr. George William Curtis is so recent a writer that some of the youngest of us may have seen him or heard his voice; yet his works have been known and loved for so many years that you will find his picture on the old, old games of "Authors," with "Potiphar Papers," "Prue and I" and "Nile Notes" around it. These essays are some of the best specimens

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of English which we have in our literature, and have always had the effect of making their readers respect and love the author. They were written long enough ago to have a little of the slowness about them which we have spoken of as belonging to the earlier part of the century; but they are bright enough, for all that. Mr. Curtis has been best known in recent years as the “Easy Chair” editor in “*Harper’s Magazine*.”

Col. Thomas Wentworth Higginson is another essayist belonging to both the readers of yesterday and of to-day, who has done well whatever he has undertaken. He was the colonel of a regiment of colored men in the late war, and has written an account of his life in this capacity; he has written a number of poems, and large numbers of entertaining essays, and is a most charming lecturer, as well. Many of us are possibly acquainted with his “*Young Folks’ History of the United States*,” which we may have had to study at school, but which we surely must have enjoyed none the less. These authors, who began to write in days less bustling and hurried than our own, and who have



RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

(Born 1803 -- Died 1882.)



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lived to bring to us some of the good things of the earlier life (while not failing to join in with the young life of to-day) are especially worthy of our attention and admiration. But few of the members of our “old school” of literature, as it is called, now remain.

One good friend of all American readers, young and old, is Dr. Edward Everett Hale, of Boston, who has been writing, and preaching, and doing good work in every way for years and years, and who is without any doubt one of the most charming of our literary men. It matters not whether he is writing for children or old people, whether it is a jolly story or a serious essay, there is in every sentence perfect simplicity, and hearty kindness and literary skill. For entertainment no one needs anything better; for instruction he is a sort of inspired schoolteacher; and if one wants to study good “style” in the use of English he will find Dr. Hale’s writings a splendid place.

We have already hinted of his fondness for young folks; he has perhaps written more for them than for any others, and his “Ten Times One,” and “In His Name” have done a great

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work all over the United States. This latter story is in some respects the best book of its kind which has ever been written. Thirty years ago he wrote a famous little story called “The Man Without a Country,” which we shall still find circulating in the bookstores as though it had lately been published. Dr. Hale’s motto has become as widely known as himself: “Look up and not down, look forward and not back, look out and not in, and lend a hand,” and gives us the idea of his whole life and work.

Others of these good prose writers are springing up all the time, so that we cannot guess who of them will remain or become famous. Mr. Charles Dudley Warner and Donald G. Mitchell (who wrote “The Reveries of a Bachelor,” and who calls himself “Ik Marvel”) are good writers of essays whom we have time only to mention. Wise men are continually adding to the fine American histories. Dr. Ridpath, Dr. Fiske and Dr. Moses Coit Tyler are some of these. It is the duty of every one who wishes to become well educated to be well acquainted with this kind of literature. Every one reads stories, and most people read poetry of one kind or

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another; but you may know that a person has brains who goes farther than that.

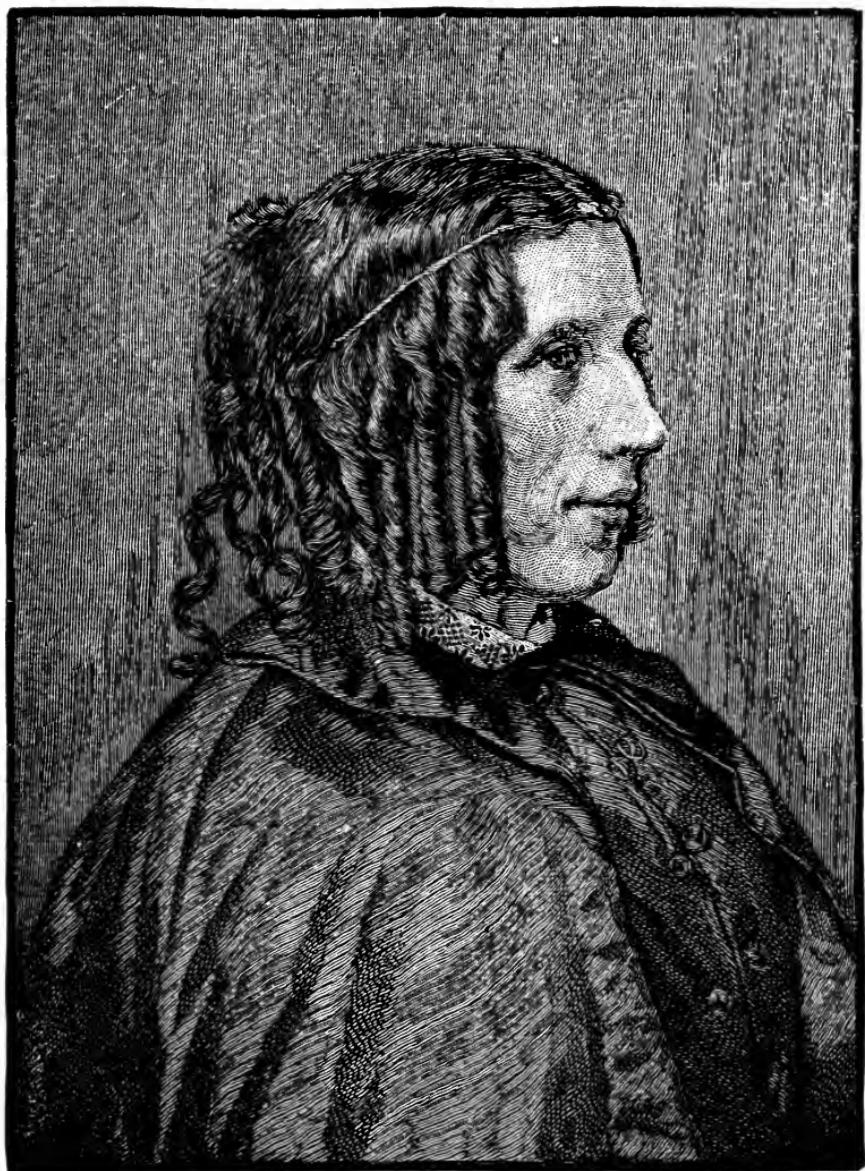
One other kind of American literature we must speak of in this paper: that which had some connection with what we call the "late" war, the War of the Rebellion. Of course any great event of that kind would have its effect on the writing of the men and women of the time, just as we saw that there was literature of the Revolutionary War. Much of that connected with the recent war time had something to do with the question of slavery, which then was being discussed all over the country, and which was settled a little later.

There were many stories and poems connected with the events of the time, there were great speeches made and afterward printed, and of course there were histories written. Two of the most important of these last are "The American Conflict," written by Mr. Horace Greeley, a prominent Northerner, and "The Rise and Fall of the Confederate States of America," written by Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederate States. Of course the great body of all this kind of

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literature lives but a short time ; the real history of any event must be written so long a time after it happened that the excitement and hard feeling connected with it may have passed away.

The three great poets of New England — Longfellow, Lowell and Whittier — all wrote war-time poems ; but the famous book of the time was a story, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” by Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe. Mrs. Stowe did not believe in the slavery of the colored people, and thought that a good way to fight it would be to write a story of life in the slave States, describing the sad things connected with the system. So it was that this book came to be published. Many of the people who lived in the slave States claimed that it was not a fair description of things as they were in that part of the country, and others claimed that it was. However that may be, the book was spread everywhere in a wonderful way, and has probably been more widely read than any other published in the United States. It has been translated into about forty foreign languages, and is still read everywhere. Mrs. Stowe wrote other stories, but none which deserved to be,



HARRIET BEECHER STOWE.
(Author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Born 1811.)



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or were, as well known as "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, a finely educated Boston lady, wrote the most popular and most beautiful song of war time, the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," beginning :

"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

This will no doubt live and be read long after we have forgotten many things about our sad Civil War. We are forgetting much of its sadness day by day, and the literature of the present time which is worth anything at all belongs to our whole country, and remembers that America is at peace, and that all her people are brothers and sisters. You young folks, especially, though you may read the history of your country and understand its happenings, need never know, and can never know, the hard feelings which once disturbed our people, and which now God has turned into brotherly kindness and peace.

IX.

A WIDELY-LOVED POET.

CONNECTED with war time in the thoughts of many who were living then, but also with more pleasant things in the memory of every one, is Mr. John Greenleaf Whittier's name. He has been, next to Longfellow, our most widely-loved American poet, and was like Longfellow in many ways — of a good New England family, of a pure and noble Christian character, and a friend of God and of every man. Unlike his great neighbor and friend, he was brought up among simple farming people, who of course had no great amount of school or college education. He had to work hard in his old Massachusetts country home when a mere boy, and knew all about the driving of cows and the other daily bits of labor and fun with which only farm boys are acquainted. He

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gained in his after life a great deal of knowledge which his own father and mother had never had, but he did not lose the simple ways and the boyish love of God and the beautiful world which his earlier days gave him.

For very many years before his recent death he was the pride of all the best Americans, and we can say as we did of Mr. Longfellow, that whatever people thought of his poetry, there seems to be no one who knew him who did not love him. He had the same thoughtfulness in little ways. You can find numbers of autographs and little letters from his hand all over the country, so willing was he to please people when it was in his power. There are many interesting things which one may learn in reading of his life and his personal habits and friends.

Whittier's poetry does not have the polished and elegant "finish" (a word which we use alike for verses and furniture — varnish) which Mr. Longfellow's fine education and studies in foreign countries gave to his; instead it is very simple, and for that reason many people have foolishly thought little of it. Perhaps his best-known long poem is "Snowbound," which con-

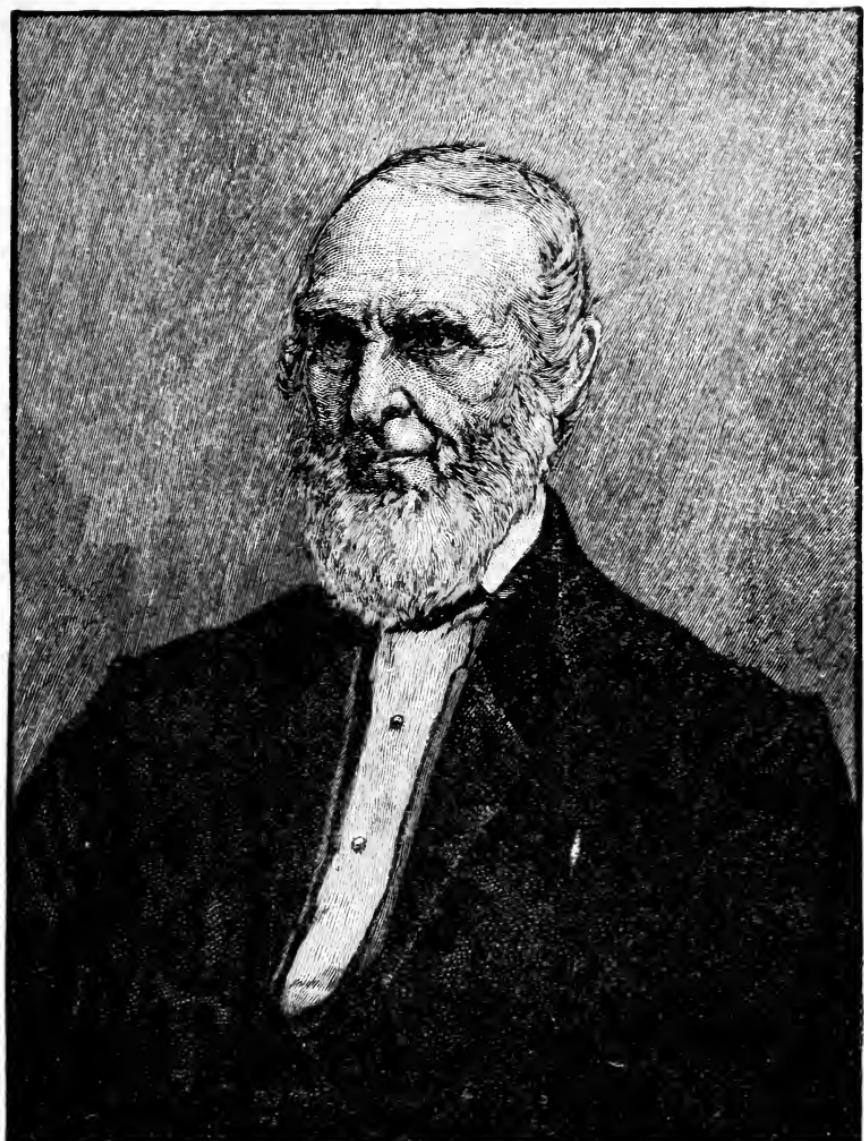
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tained pictures of the New England winter life as he had known it when a boy, and passages of which we need not fear to compare with any American poetry; but it is his hundreds of quaint shorter poems which have gone everywhere, and which one might say that every one knows.

All young folks like to read (and recite, too) "Barbara Frietchie" and "In School Days," and one of his most pleasing writings is the well-known "Barefoot Boy." We will read a few lines of this poem :

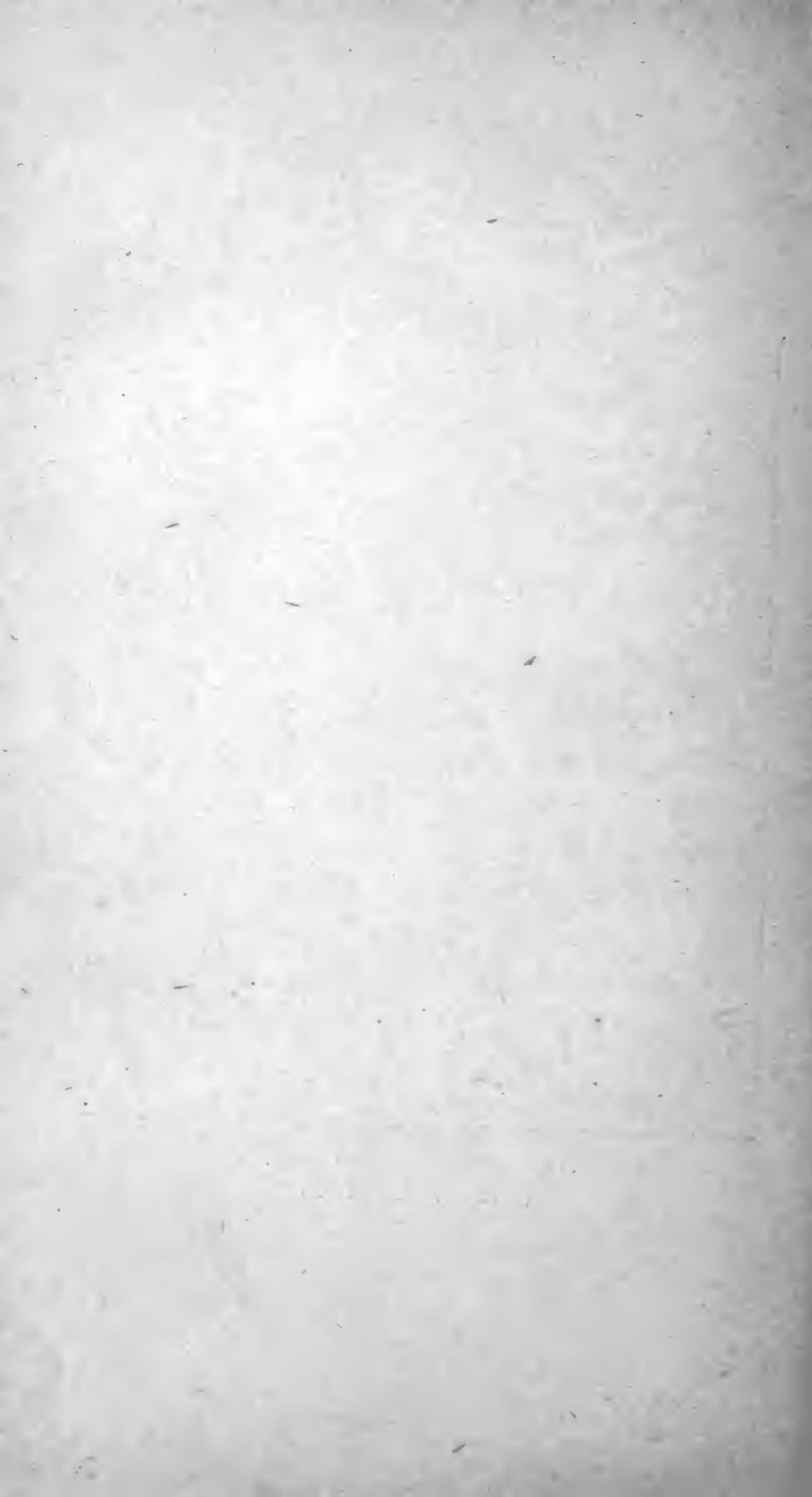
"Blessings on thee, little man,
Barefoot boy, with cheek of tan!
With thy turned-up pantaloons,
And thy merry whistled tunes;
With thy red lip, redder still
Kissed by strawberries on the hill;
With the sunshine on thy face,
Through thy torn brim's jaunty grace;
From my heart I give thee joy—
I was once a barefoot boy.

• • • • •
"O for festal dainties spread,
Like my bowl of milk and bread—
Pewter spoon and bowl of wood,
On the door-stone gray and rude!
O'er me, like a regal tent,
Cloudy-ribbed, the sunset bent,
Purple-curtained, fringed with gold,
Looped in many a wind-swung fold;



JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER.

(Born 1807—Died 1892.)



A WIDELY-LOVED POET.

White for music came the play
Of the pied frogs' orchestra;
And, to light the noisy choir,
Lit the fly his lamp of fire.
I was monarch: pomp and joy
Waited on the barefoot boy!"

We have already hinted that Mr. Whittier was an unusually true Christian; he belonged to the old-fashioned Society of Friends (whom we usually call "Quakers"), and always used the quaint "thee" and "thou" of that church. Many of his most lovely poems have come to be used as favorite hymns in our singing books; and we cannot tell but they may be using them in this way in Heaven, now that the dear old man is there to join the chorus. One of his very last bits of writing was a birthday poem addressed to an old friend of his, which contains some beautiful lines that we may like to see, though they may be too much the words of an old man for young folks to really understand:

"Among the thousands who with hail and cheer
Will welcome thy new year,
How few of all have passed, as thou and I,
So many milestones by!

"Far off, and faint as echoes of a dream,
The songs of boyhood seem,

A WIDELY-LOVED POET.

Yet on our autumn boughs, unflown with spring,
The evening thrushes sing.

“The hour draws near, howe'er delayed and late,
When at the Eternal Gate
We leave the words and works we call our own,
And lift void hands alone

“For love to fill. Our nakedness of soul
Brings to that Gate no toll;
Giftless, we come to Him who all things gives,
And live because He lives!”

The friend to whom this was written, on his eighty-third birthday, was Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, perhaps the last man left on earth of a great group of our best American writers. For a long, long time he has been cheering and helping his countrymen with his work, though not by any means as a writer only. Some of Dr. Holmes' poetry we may count among our best, and a still larger amount of his prose. Perhaps his most famous single poem is “The Chambered Nautilus,” which contains the great lines :

“Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!”

But a very large part of his work has been in

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the line of mere merry-making, like the story of the “One-Hoss Shay,” and great numbers of what we call “occasional” poems—that is, those written for some special time, as for birthdays or anniversaries or historical celebrations. There is one not of this kind which we may rank with “The Chambered Nautilus,” and that is “The Last Leaf.” It was a favorite of President Lincoln’s, and contains some fine lines.

Dr. Holmes has been a busy physician as well as a poet, and his work is perhaps a little hasty for this reason. His best prose writings are those which charmed our fathers and mothers years ago, called “The Breakfast Table Series,” which are not stories, and not essays, but a happy and odd mixture of the two. We may well be thankful that this merry gentleman has been spared till our time, with a pen and a heart which have neither of them grown old.

There are three poets with whom we are probably not well acquainted, but with whom we certainly should be some day. The first one is Sidney Lanier, a charming writer from the Southern part of our country, who has been not

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widely read, but who, in the opinion of some of our wisest men, if he had lived to be an older man, would have become one of our greatest poets. The other names are those of Mr. Edmund Clarence Stedman and Mr. Thomas Bailey Aldrich, who have done very fine work in the matter of writing poetry. Mr. Aldrich is best known from his beautiful "Babie Bell."

X.

FRIENDS OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE.

NOWADAYS we have numbers of books marked "A Story for Boys," or "A Story for Girls," but it is not these which the boys and the girls most truly like. It is rather those which are written so brightly and skillfully that old and young enjoy them alike.

Louisa Alcott should perhaps not be put among these recent writers, since it is now many years that she has been known as a favorite; but we may certainly speak of her first among these friends of the young folks. "Little Women" was, not long ago, the great story book for all the girls, and although the style of story books has changed since it was written, the girls of to-day have not forgotten it. And the boys, while they never confessed to reading it, could probably discuss it quite as

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intelligently as their sisters. “Little Men” and “Jo’s Boys” kept up the story, as we always feel that good stories should be kept up; and others of Miss Alcott’s books were widely read, both in this country and elsewhere.

She was a New England lady, the daughter of a great scholar, and seems to have been the true woman and kind friend which we should expect. There are many things in her stories which one can criticise when he sets about it, but on the whole they have always been thought bright and true and helpful. They opened up a new kind of story-writing in America, for which we should be truly thankful.

“Little Lord Fauntleroy” seems to have charmed every one who has read it, in spite of the fact that it is neither a fairy tale nor in any way a story of every-day life. Mrs. Burnett, the author, is one of our best-known American novelists, but has made her greatest success in this story for children. A kind of sketch

Other American writers of experience who devote their time to writing for young people are John T. Trowbridge, author of “Neighbor Jackwood,” William O. Stoddard, who wrote



LOUISA M. ALCOTT.

(Born 1833 — Died 1888.)



FRIENDS OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE.

“Guert Ten Eyck” and “Chuck Purdy,” Ros-siter Johnson, author of “Phaeton Rogers,” one of the best books for boys, Elbridge S. Brooks, who wrote of “Historic Boys” and “Historic Girls,” Kirk Munroe, Kate Douglas Wiggin, author of “The Birds’ Christmas Carol,” and others of equal prominence.

Few fairy stories are written in America. Most children prefer nowadays to think of the people in books as really true. But we have had some favorite “wonder stories” which we need not be ashamed of, and the prince of the writers of these is Mr. Frank Stockton. Mr. Stockton writes wonder stories for young folks and old folks, and all of a delightfully funny and irresistible kind. His most famous sketches are “The Lady or the Tiger?” which has puzzled people for years and years, and “The Casting Away of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Ale-shine,” a shipwreck story which will make the soberest person laugh until the tears roll down his cheeks. The great thing about Mr. Stock-ton’s work is that he always tells the most im-possible things as though they were solemn facts, and people always like to be imposed

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upon in this way. Of course none of his writings are of a serious character, or of a kind which one would expect to live a long time; but they are worthy of being called literature because they are done in the very best English, and told in a pure and charmingly simple style.

So many of these good story writers have arisen in the past few years that one does not know which ones to speak of. Mary Mapes Dodge, the editor of "St. Nicholas," and the author of "Hans Brinker; or, the Silver Skates," is another young folks' favorite. A very large amount of writing has been done in the line of what we call "Sabbath-school books," some of which deserve the name, and many of which do not. Surely the stories which are written for the plain purpose of helping people to be better, as such books are supposed to be, are worthy a good deal of attention; and yet there is little in this line that we should call real literature, because it is a sad fact that only a few of the people who can really write well have given time to this kind of work.

There have been five women who have given

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their time to it, and have been of no one knows how much help in the way of making books which are thoroughly well written and interesting, and at the same time honestly helpful. Mrs. Adeline D. T. Whitney is one of these; her stories are charming ones of New England life, and among the best of them are “Faith Gartney’s Girlhood,” and “Patience Strong’s Outings.” Miss Anna and Miss Susan Warner are the second and third; they wrote together a number of books, and Miss Susan Warner’s “Wide, Wide World” has had a remarkably large number of readers, though it is by no means her best work. Mrs. Alden (Pansy) is at present the best-known of all writers of this class, and her books have indeed done a wonderful work in bettering the style of Sabbath-school literature. Her “Ester Ried” alone would have been something worth living for, and other books of hers have been translated into French, Norwegian, Japanese, Armenian, and other languages. To have her record of help given to young and old is better, after all, than a hole in Westminster Abbey for one’s grave.

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The last of these five is Mrs. Lothrop (Margaret Sidney), who is properly the successor to Miss Alcott, her "Five Little Peppers" being always classed with "Little Women." These two authors go hand in hand together in public regard, their books being in equal demand in the libraries all over the country. This library test, after all, is a pretty sure indication of the popularity of a writer.

Margaret Sidney by birth and education was equipped for her task. It is a singular coincidence that her home is the beautiful "Way-side," Concord, Mass., where the Alcotts lived when young people, and the principal features of "Little Women" were daily occurrences. Afterward, in 1852, Mr. Bronson Alcott, Louisa's father, sold the place to Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose home it was until his death, in 1864.

All poets are the children's friends, and Mr. James Whitcomb Riley most of all. Every person has his own private opinion of what a poet really is, and to-day many people turn up their noses when Mr. Riley is called one. As he is a writer of but a few years' standing no

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one can undertake to decide the question yet; but if he is a poet at all he is the poet of the children, and of the great body of Americans besides. He is best known to us (though not because he does not write charmingly in good English) as a dialect writer; first, in the language of the Western farmer, and second, in the language of the small boy.

Lowell, as we have seen, made the New England country dialect famous by the “Biglow Papers,” and Mr. Riley has done the same thing for the Hoosiers, as Indiana people call themselves. No one seems to know whether to be most pleased by his farmers or his children. “Knee-Deep in June,” and “Thoughts for the Discouraged Farmer” on the one hand, and “Little Orphant Allie” and her “gobuluns,” with “The Raggedy Man” on the other, are perhaps the most famous poems — for we will risk calling them poems, after all. Then “The South Wind and the Sun” and “Don’t Cry” we will take as examples of those in ordinary English. They are almost all short, and when we take up one of the little volumes of them we find it hard work to lay it down.

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Let us look at one of these:

“ ‘ How would Willie like to go
To the Land of Thus-and-So?
Everything is proper there;
All the children comb their hair
Smoother than the fur of cats,
Or the nap of high silk hats;
Every face is clean and white
As a lily washed in light;
Never vaguest soil or speck
Found on forehead, throat or neck —
Every little crimped ear,
In and out, as pure and clear
As the cherry-blossom’s blow,
In the Land of Thus-and-So.’

• • • • •
“ ‘ Oh! the Land of Thus-and-So —
Isn’t it delightful, though?’
‘ Yes,’ lisped Willie, answering me
Somewhat slow and doubtfully;
‘ Must be awful nice, but I
Ruther wait till by and by
‘ Fore I go there — maybe when
I be dead I’ll go there then.
But’ — the little troubled face
Closer pressed in my embrace —
‘ Le’s don’t never ever go
To the Land of Thus-and-So.’ ”

To some people words are only things to be used as they have always been used; others can make and choose, and turn and twist them, until our language becomes something newer and greater than it ever has seemed before. James Whitcomb Riley is one of these.

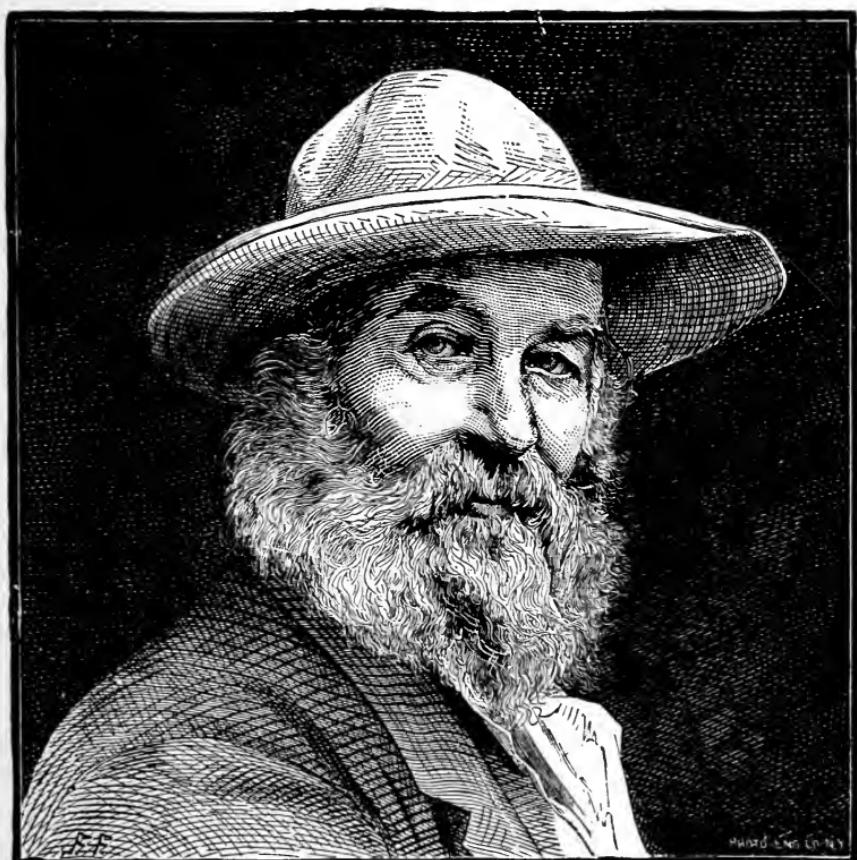
XI.

WRITERS OF POETRY.

TWO writers of poetry certainly remain whose work has lately been talked of quite widely. In the case of the first this is not because he began to write only of late, since for a number of years he was a prominent American — perhaps not so much as a poet as a curiosity. This man was Walt Whitman, who died not long ago in his home in New Jersey, and who wrote a few things which were generally thought to be good, and a great many things which most people thought to be mere trash. There is no writer who cannot find some friends to call him a great man, and so it happens that there are a few strange people who call Walt Whitman our greatest American poet. There are but few who call him a poet at all.

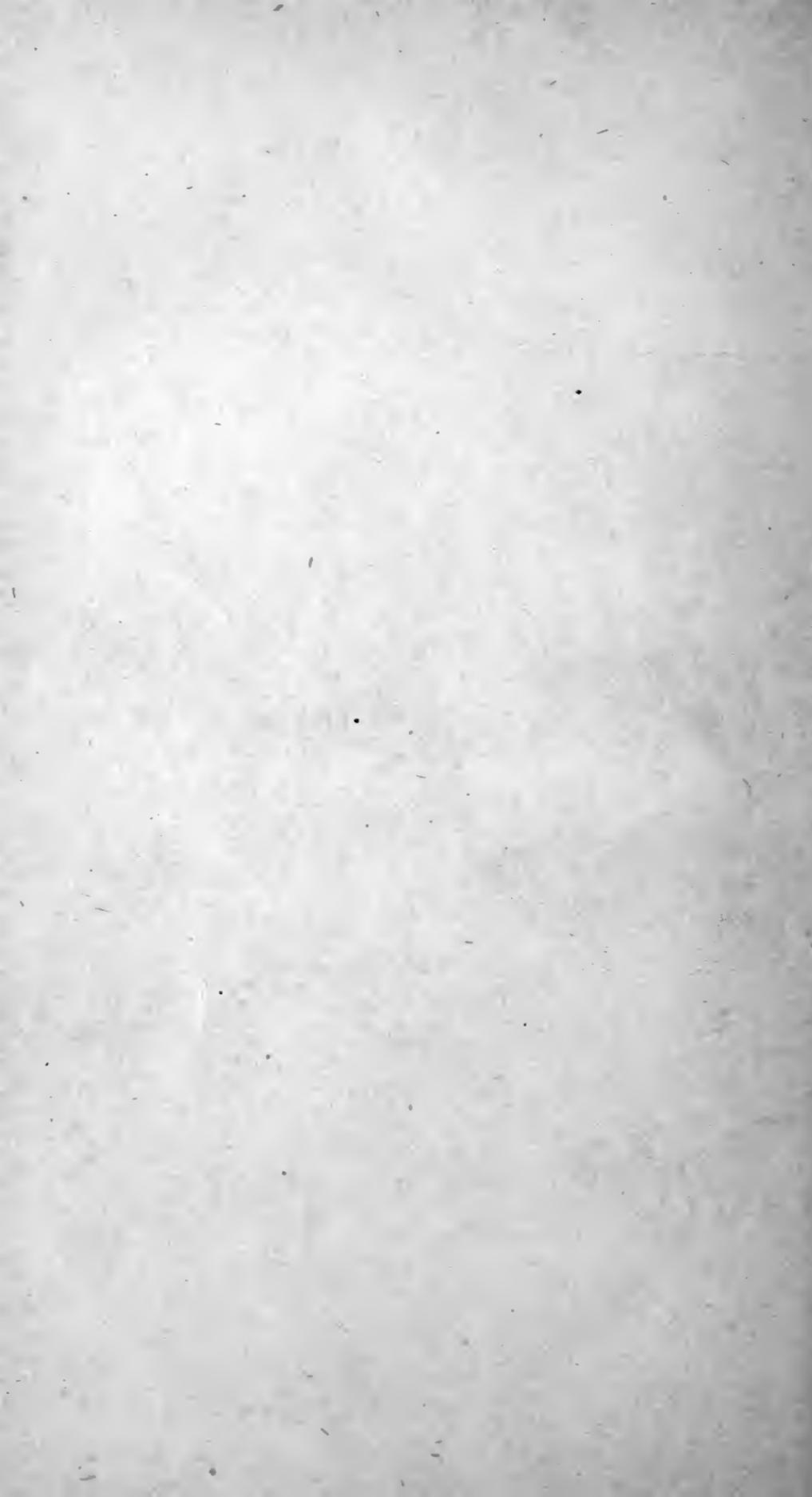
WRITERS OF POETRY.

He was an odd man who lived very much by himself, always went about in a slouch hat and an outing shirt, and wrote like nobody else in the world. He believed (or pretended to) that it was the duty of a poet to say just what he thought in whatever sort of language he liked ; and so he wrote a number of very coarse things which no one should care to read. He did not think it was at all necessary to pay any attention to rhyme or meter in order to write poetry, and so the large part of his writings you would never suspect of being intended for poetry unless they were printed in the form of verses ; yet he had a sort of a rhythm, instead of the meter, something like that of the Book of Psalms in the Bible. Some things in his works are not queer, but are of good style, and quite beautiful ; perhaps the best is “ My Captain,” written after the death of President Lincoln. Walt Whitman thought that he was the great poet of the people, because he did not follow the rules of poetry or pay attention to the scholars ; but it is only in foreign countries that any one thinks he is America’s favorite, for neither you nor I nor the common people



WALT WHITMAN.

(Born 1819 — Died 1892.)



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would either wish or are able to understand much of his work. We will look at a few lines from his “Miracles of Nature,” for no other purpose than to see the strange style :

“To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,
Every inch of space is a miracle,
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with
the same,
Every cubic foot of the interior swarms with the same.

“To me the sea is a continual miracle,
The fishes that swim, the rocks, the motion of the waves, the
ships with men in them—
What stranger miracles are there?”

After this it is only fair to give also a verse from “My Captain” :

“My captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;
But the ship — the ship is anchored safe, its voyage closed
and done;
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won.
Exult, O, shores! and ring, O, bells!
But I, with silent tread,
Walk the spot my captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.”

Emily Dickinson has been read but a very little time. She was a New England lady who wrote entirely for her own pleasure, and not at all “for publication,” so that it was only after her death that her poems were printed. They

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were edited by her good friend Colonel Higginson; and it is he who has told us many strange and interesting things about this quiet little poet. It seems sad that Miss Dickinson could not have lived to enjoy the friendships which her poems would have made for her; for the first volume of them became the most popular book of the year in which it was printed.

They are all short and quaint, and few of them would be of much interest to the younger ones of us; but some day we shall surely wish to know them, and if in ten or twenty years the world should carelessly have forgotten these poems (which it is not likely to), we may perhaps bring them forward again.

Miss Dickinson, too, cared very little about rules of rhyming, and so it often happens that a verse of hers sounds odd if read aloud, though it might seem all right if read only by the eyes; the meter, however, and (what is more important) the sweet and bright thoughts follow the best rules in the world, and the poems are perhaps the best of their kind which have been written for many a year. We will

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read just a few verses, to see what they are like.

Here is a short song about “A Day”:

“I’ll tell you how the sun rose—
A ribbon at a time;
The steeples swam in amethyst—
The news like squirrels ran.
The hills untied their bonnets—
The bobolinks begun.
Then I said softly to myself:
That must have been the sun.

“But how he set I know not;
There seemed a purple stile,
Which little yellow boys and girls
Were climbing all the while;
Till, when they reached the other side,
A dominie in gray
Put gently up the evening bars,
And led the flock away.”

She knew the bees and flowers and butterflies, and tells of the snake as the “narrow fellow in the grass,” and of the robin “in red cravat,” and touches whatever she writes of with the same strange beauty.

We come now to the biggest (not the greatest) part of our American literature, and now that we are here have little to say of it.

This is the part that makes and sells the

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most books, that fills the most shelves in the stores, that composes the packages of the agents in the railroad trains, and that the great majority of our people read to by far the greatest extent. Of course we mean the stories — the novels. They will not occupy much of our space, because the large majority of them are not good literature, and because it has happened that we have never had a really great American novelist, like Scott or Dickens or Thackeray in England (unless we should except Nathaniel Hawthorne), though we have had really great poets and historians. Some books of this kind we have already spoken of — those of Fenimore Cooper, and Mrs. Stowe, and Mrs. Burnett and Frank Stockton — and there is a great crush of story-writers coming up nowadays, some of whom may turn out to be really great. Perhaps the most popular American novel of late years has been (like Scott's) historical — General Wallace's "*Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*," which we all either have read or wish to read. But the most of them are of a dashing, lively style which does not belong to historical fields.

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Our best novelists are generally thought to be Mr. Henry James and Mr. W. D. Howells, though they are neither of them of the dashing and lively sort, nor can they continue to be widely read for a long time after they die, since they write of things and people that will be forgotten in a few years. Mr. Howells has written some exceedingly clever little plays (the funniest of which are "The Elevator" and "The Sleeping-Car"), and some fine stories, the best of which is, perhaps, "A Modern Instance." He is also called the great American "realist." We can scarcely take time to explain just what is meant by this, but in general the realist writes about things just exactly as they are, and the other kind of man, whom we call the "idealist," of things as they might be, or as he thinks they should be. You will see that the realist is nearest the historian, and the idealist nearest the writer of fairy tales. We have the same division of workers in painting and sculpture. There is a great statue of Washington in front of the United States Capitol representing him with bare arms and neck, and with the simple robe of the old-time Roman

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citizen. Now of course President Washington never went about the streets in any such costume, and would have been thought crazy if he had, so many people have made a deal of fun of this statue.

Such people are “realists.” Others, when looking at the statue, think of the ways in which George Washington was like a Roman citizen, and also remember that the Greek and Roman costumes were the most graceful that the world has ever seen; and these are not displeased by it.

The dispute between these two kinds of people is a wide one, and extremely hard to understand; but it will be good practice for us, in reading stories, to make up our minds whether we think they belong to realism or idealism. It will be a still better plan to avoid reading stories which are of such small value that it makes no difference to any one to which class they belong.

XII.

MODERN NOVELISTS.

AMONG modern novelists all readers have their favorites; and even among those who are considered worthy of special mention it is hard to make any choice. Let us look for a moment at one particular class of story-writers—those whose writings have to do with some particular locality. In the paper on Irving we spoke of what is meant by “local literature,” and since his day almost every part of our country has had its turn in short stories and novels. Of course when a good writer turns to some interesting locality his work is all the more pleasant; but it is a mistake to suppose that any one can get up a good story by laying his scene in any particular place.

There was a time when the new settlements of the West were the scene of much story-

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writing, and among the literature of that kind are Edward Eggleston's "*Hoosier Schoolmaster*," and Joaquin Miller's and Bret Harte's stories and verses, together with a great deal of poor writing. Nowadays it is the South to which story-tellers turn, and although (as we have said before) the magazines have been overrun with stories and sketches of the negroes and "*poor whites*" of this part of the country, there is in the Southern States material for very interesting literary work. Four writers are worthy of mention who have made use of this in widely different ways: George W. Cable, who writes charmingly of the Creole country about New Orleans; Charles Egbert Craddock (Miss Murfree), whose stories are of the white mountaineers of Tennessee and North Carolina; Thomas Nelson Page, who has lately become popular through his sketches of Virginia life, and Joel Chandler Harris, who gathered the "*Uncle Remus Stories*" from the old colored people of the South, and wrote them down with great skill for white readers.

There are other classes of our literature about which a deal might be written if there were

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time. We might speak of the humorists, such as Artemus Ward and Mark Twain, whose work is what we call "characteristically American," but of course not very much in the way of literature. We ought to consider a class of books which are called "stories written with a purpose," and which have of late received not a little attention. Now of course every story is written with some sort of a purpose in the mind of the author; but it frequently happens that a man will have an unusual theory or idea about either religion or politics, or the way in which people should live, and instead of writing essays or sermons to explain what he thinks, he says: "I will write a story, and make the people in it live just as I think they should, and show how finely they get along." We have numbers of novels of this kind, and they are extremely likely to be of little use, either as novels or anything else. In the first place people do not care to read stories which they see are only essays or sermons with story-books' clothes on them; and in the second place the man who writes such a book has everything in his own hands, and is able to make the story

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end just as he chooses, so that it proves nothing to those who read it, unless they believe that things would happen in fact as they do in the book. One of the best books of this kind which have appeared for a long time is "Looking Backward," written by Edward Bellamy to defend a theory which is called "nationalism."

We must carefully make a difference between books which have a good purpose running right through them (as all good books will), like a gold thread in a piece of cloth, and those which are poor stories, with the purpose pasted on in patches on the outside.

Another kind of literature on which considerable time might be spent is that included in short stories, which have only of late come into great favor. Some of the best writers of these have already been spoken of among the other authors, but we nowadays see in the magazines the names of many bright literary people who devote their work almost entirely to this very pleasant kind of literature. It is, in fact, the magazines which have brought about this change. Some of them have been going on for a number of years, but after all the magazine

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as it is to-day is quite a late affair. We all know the names of the great monthly magazines of America. In these the literature is of the best kind, and much of it will no doubt last for a long time. We have already said that to-day we demand that pieces of literature shall be short, so that busy people may enjoy them, and the magazines have answered this demand. They have done another fine thing; they have made it possible for any one who can write a good article or story to get it printed, and to be well paid for it. It is only very lately that this could be said. Now probably one person in ten, among people of any education, has written something intended for publication; and although most of them have never seen anything of their own published, they have the chance of knowing that if they can do any really good work in this line it will be sure to find its place in the world.

This magazine tendency, as we might call it, is one of the most interesting things which we see in the literature of to-day. Something like it, but very far below it, is what we might call the newspaper tendency. At present the news-

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papers try to do far more than to simply collect the happenings of every day and give them to the people; they try to furnish literature—stories, essays, poems—and as there are few of them which are able to do this well, we have a great mass of newspaper reading which might much better be destroyed before being printed. The newspaper English is apt to be the worst English, and if we are not very careful we shall find in a few years that the reading of newspapers among our American people has done real harm to our literature which cannot be cured for a long, long time.

We have now come to the end of our study of the literature of America. We have seen how it started from the few efforts of those who came to this country from England, and who told what they found here for the benefit of their friends at home; how it grew with the growing nation, overcoming all the hard things which lay in its way, until now we are building the most magnificent library building in the world as the fit home of the work of the American people for the literature of the world; how in spite of the small hopes which other nations

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had of our worth in this direction, we have given them poets and historians and essayists they have been glad to learn to love and appreciate.

What remains to be done no one knows. Some people think that as the country grows more rich and more busy our literary worth will go backward; but let us hope and pray that it may not be so. The great and good men and women who put on paper for us the best thoughts and feelings which they have for the world, leave us the best gift which we could possibly have. To one who has learned to know what literature means, no matter how young or ignorant he is, a library is not a quiet room with rows upon rows of dusty, old-smelling books on the shelves; it is a place where there are hundreds of good friends waiting to smile upon him, and to whisper good words in his ear; to tell him all the secrets which all the years of the past have stored up for him, and to let him feel their good-heartedness and teach him to grow like them. So our American literature will grow good and great according as we grow good and great.

And we all have a duty to it. Many of us

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would like to write books, and some of us will; but to all alike comes the duty of reading them, and of reading only the best. Let us insist that those who write for us shall use good language, and shall have something worth saying to say to us. Let us at least wait until we have read all the good books which have been written before we turn to those which cannot help us. If we do this, when we are old and white-haired and spectacled we shall have such treasures of good reading stored up in our minds that we can never be sad or lonely, and (though it seems odd enough to think of it now) the young folks of those days will look at us with wide eyes, and long to be as wise and good as we.











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